



TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT:

OR,

Short Stories for Long Evenings.

BY

SIDNEY DARYL. *copied.*
Sir Douglas Straight

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUSSIE BRIDGMAN.

"I love thee, Twilight! for thy gleams impart
Their dear, their dying influence to my heart."

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TO
JOHN RAYMOND, ESQ.,
OF
THE MIDDLE TEMPLE,
Barrister-at-Law,

AS A TRIFLING BUT HEARTFELT TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION AND RESPECT
FOR KINDNESS THAT CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN,
SAVE WITH LIFE,

THIS BOOK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, IN WHOSE SOCIETY HE SO DELIGHTS,

IS DEDICATED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

FROM some altogether incomprehensible causes it has become absolutely necessary that every book, no matter what the subject with which it treats, should open with a preface. What the precise object of this arrangement is, I am quite at a loss to discover ; though possibly it is intended to enable the author to get rid of certain egotistical nothings that are always tolerated and very seldom read by anybody but himself. As the showman shouts outside his caravan at the country fair, lauding his own exertions and profuse expenditure of capital to induce people to step within, so it is the fashion with writers on the threshold of their books to make an appeal for perusal and sympathy. Now, I feel myself in the present case that the constituency I address is not to be trifled with or hoodwinked ; if I hope to secure their favourable consideration and unanimous suffrages I must be exceeding plain-spoken and candid. Allow me then, my dear young people, because it is you I am talking about, to invite you to "walk up" into my exhibition and see what there is to be seen. If you expect to find anything start-

ling, hair-breadth escapes by land and sea, swords and pistols, fights and gunpowder, I am bound to tell you that you must take yourself and your money to another establishment, for I have none of these. But if you care for homely things, and are not ashamed to learn a moral from what is presented for your edification, I am trustful that in these respects, should you extend your patronage to me you will not be disappointed, and will find yourself pleasantly amused. If I may acquaint you with a secret, let me tell you that ever since I first had the grateful task of writing for young people, I have always made it my endeavour to gain their sympathies and notice by framing my stories as much as possible in accordance with "truth" and reality. I leave it to others who are far better able to perform the task, to startle and excite ; for me it is enough if I can move only the more quiet and sober feelings of my readers. Passing each of my family of eight in review, there is little in their appearance to strike an observer, in short, their pretensions to notice are small. But what I ask is that you, my dear young people, will not shrink from making a close acquaintance with them, but that you will give them the benefit of your friendship, so as to discover whether there really is anything in them worthy your attention. I wish I could make you understand how my heart yearns to you all, and what I would give to be able to

sit down by each and every one of you, when you take up this book. Never was author more greedy for the approval of his readers than I am for yours. But I must have done with egotism ; as I said before, "walk up" into my exhibition and judge of its worth for yourselves ; and if you are pleased by it, say so. Perhaps by some round-about means the good news might find its way to my ears.

Let me add that "Little Johnny," "Nellie's Fault," and "Left Alone," originally appeared in *Aunt Judy's Magazine*; and "Barney's Little Wife," "Lisette's Birthday," and "Joey the Tumbler," in *Merry and Wise*. As for "Wanted a Stitch," and "Cousin Fanny," they have not made their appearance in public before.

SIDNEY DARYL.

St. George's Square, S.W.,
November 21st, 1867.

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TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT.



Little Johnny.

“Those only are the brave who keep their ground,
And keep it to the last.”—*Blair*.

EVERYBODY in Harmouth knew Little Johnny, with his crooked back and tiny crutch, by means of which he managed to get over the ground a good deal faster than most other people who had free use of their legs. A great favourite was he with the bluff, weather-beaten beachmen, who often used to take him out with them in their shore-boats to the luggers when they were bringing their night's catching ashore. Then they used to make him sing, for he had a capital voice, and had learned to give out the “Death of Nelson” and “Tom Bowling,” with nautical emphasis and spirit not to be expected in a child of ten. Standing on the shore you could hear his notes sounding over the water, and presently the shouts and hurrahs of his audience when he came to a conclusion. Johnny had no mother; she had long been dead, having only lived to bring her child into the world, and then passed quietly

away as if in a peaceful sleep. The only vestige that remained to him of her was a green mound under the great yew-tree in the corner of Harmouth Churchyard, and there every Sunday after the morning service, he and his father might be found hand-in-hand, silent and sad. For though he had lost his wife close on half a score years, Joe Barton, rough and iron-hearted as he was, had not forgotten her who for one brief twelve-month made life sunshine to him. "Poor little woman!" he would say, turning away; and as he passed through the gate that led out of the resting-place of the dead, a great salt tear as big as a pebble would force its way out, and slowly creep down his brown cheek.

In a comfortable cottage just outside the town Joe and his little lame son lived, for he had been a successful man: from a poor, struggling fisherman he had gradually become part owner of a lugger, then sole proprietor, and then at last had no less than three boats of his own. So in course of time he secured a very nice little nest-egg, which he invested in the shares of the County Bank, and then having laboured long and well, retired to rest him for the remainder of his days. The Bank had a local branch at Harmouth, and most of the fishermen and inhabitants deposited their money there. It was extraordinary what an intense love he had for the sea. He was wont to say "That it did his heart good to hear the waves, and that they used to talk to him for all the world like human beings." When he gave up fishing "to rest on his oars," as he would laughingly remark, he had built a small pleasure-boat, which was christened with great ceremony *The Saucy Jack*, and a smart, trim little

craft she was, with sailing powers something perfectly miraculous. All through the summer she was kept fully occupied, and heartrending were the appeals Joe had to listen to from the juvenile frequenters of the beach to take them out for a sail with him. But he always had plenty of company, and what with his sea stories and biscuits and ginger-beer, Joe Barton was at last worshipped as a hero. Johnny always went with him on these marine excursions, and despite his deformity and ever-attendant crutch, without which he could not move, he had learned to handle and manœuvre *The Saucy Jack* with the greatest ease, and was as expert at "taking in a reef" or "putting about" as the oldest salt in Harmouth.

It was a glorious summer's day, the sea so smooth that it rippled on to the beach without noise, and seemed to be coyly kissing the pebbles. So hot, too, that the rowers in the many boats floating about were leaning listlessly on their oars, allowing themselves to drift lazily along with the tide. All Harmouth seemed to be on the water; everything in the shape of a boat was engaged. *The Saucy Jack* alone remained idle. There she lay, about a hundred yards from the shore, securely anchored, and everything as neatly fastened up as when she had been left "all snug" the night before. Many and anxious were the inquiries for Joe Barton, and general were the expressions of regret that he should not be in the way on such a lovely day. No one knew where he had gone, not even Johnny. All he could say was that his father had received a letter the night before, after reading which he had sat silent and gloomy all the rest of the evening, and gone out before six o'clock in the

morning, when he was a-bed, without saying a word. So *The Saucy Jack* remained idle all through that livelong summer's day.

Evening came on, and Johnny, who had been lounging about uneasily, for he could not bear his father to be away from him, began to feel very tired and sleepy, and thinking that a nap on board would be cool and comfortable, hailed one of the passing boats, and was duly transported to *The Saucy Jack*. Creeping into the little cabin at her bow, in which spare sails, empty ginger-beer bottles, and such-like were kept, he soon fell into a sound and heavy slumber. How long it lasted he knew not, but when he woke he was startled by hearing a rippling sound in the neighbourhood of his head ; it was quite dark, too, and the boat felt as if she were moving smartly along. What could have happened ? Had she broke away from her anchor ? For a moment he lay still, frightened in spite of himself. Then slowly he raised himself on his elbow, and rubbing his eyes, peered through the narrow aperture through which he had entered. He could see the main-sail bellied out with the fresh breeze, and that was all. But was it not enough ?

He knew he was out on the sea, but how had he come there !

Could anybody out of spite have sent him adrift ? No ; he knew of no one who had a grudge against him. Suddenly he was startled by a groan as if of a human being in pain. His heart thumped against his side, the perspiration broke out in great beads on his forehead ; he neither moved hand nor foot. Then ensued an agonizing silence, and next a voice, hoarse and broken with emotion, burst into a passionate prayer.

Johnny was braver now, and dragging himself along on his hands and knees, as quickly as his infirmities would allow, he made for the entrance, and thrust his head out. There was no moon, but the stars shone out bravely, and in their light he could see the figure of a man with his back towards him, rocking to and fro as if in the throes of despair, his face buried in his hands, and murmuring to himself. Who could it be? Johnny essayed to speak, but his lips were parched, soundless, and glued together, his tongue rough and dry. He stared at the black shadow, as if it were a spirit. Between it and him there was a seat running across the boat, he tried to reach it, in order to pull himself along, but could not. The figure moved its head.

In a momentary flash of summer lightning Johnny saw that it was his father!

He sought to speak again, but he could not, while his eyes eagerly devoured his every movement. He saw him move his hand down to the seat beside him, he saw him raise his arm with something that glittered in the silver light, he heard a click, and then, as if by inspiration, the truth burst upon him. Hurling himself forward with the energy of despair, Johnny caught his father by the arm. There was a flash, a report, and then he felt something graze his fingers. But he heeded it not; seizing the pistol from his hand, he threw it with all his strength into the sea, and then sank fainting into the bottom of the boat.

Black grew the clouds, higher rose the wind, beating up the waves into angry contention. There was every appearance to betoken the advent of a severe storm. *The Saucy Jack*, left to

herself, was heeling over in the trough of the sea in a perilous manner, but still Joe Barton, for it was he, sat with his face in his hands ; still Johnny lay silent and motionless in the bottom of the boat. Presently a great, green wave came curling along, and dashing against the boat's side, wetted both to the skin. It roused Joe from his stupor, it roused Johnny from his insensibility ; in another moment they were in one another's arms. Still the wind freshened, still the waves rose higher and higher, those two clasped in that firm embrace heeded them not, for the mercy of God was in their hearts, and storm and tempest had no fear for them.

It blew a gale that night and morning, and a large vessel went ashore on Harmouth sands, but by Heaven's goodness no lives were lost. Through the long dreary hours of darkness the wives of the fishermen lay sleepless and uneasy in their beds, for their good-men were out on the angry sea earning bread for them and the children. The hoarse voice of the wind and the angry roar of the waves sent a thrill to their hearts as they heard them growling and battling out in the gloom, and many a prayer stole up through the black sky and sought the ear of the Unseen. When the morning sun broke bravely through the drifting clouds, there was a heartfelt shout of thanksgiving to see the toilers of the night come safely into harbour. Huge were the breakfasts eaten, sound was the sleep that followed, for it had been a hard fight between man and the elements.

Later in the day a knot of men were lounging on the shore. “Where's *The Saucy Jack?*” asked one. “Ain't Joe Barton turned up yet?” said another. While old Murtoch, the patri-

arch of the group, mumbled out "She ain't drawed up, she ain't at anchor. I'm blessed if I don't think she's gone down head first."

This inaugurated a conversation about Joe, and various and singular were the reasons given for his continued absence. While they were engaged in this discussion, a man, bareheaded and breathless, rushed frantically down over the pebbles, his face pale as death, his eyes almost starting out of his head. When he reached the group, he stopped and remained speechless. "Hullo, Silas, what's wrong, lad?" inquired one. "You look dazed, man," said another.

"The Bank!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Well, what of the Bank?" asked old Murtoch, impatiently.

"It's broke," he gasped, and then, without vouchsafing any further information, rushed away as quickly as he had come. The news he brought fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of those to whom he told it; for a moment they seemed stricken dumb and incapable of moving hand or foot, and then hastened up to the town to find if the bearer of these evil tidings had spoken the truth.

Alas! it was but too true; the County Bank, being unable to meet a run upon its resources on the previous day at the chief market-town, where its head office was, had been compelled to stop payment, and close all its branch establishments. Considerable assets, however, were expected, the number of shareholders being amply sufficient to cover all liabilities. It was some time before the Harmouth fishermen could be made to understand that, if they were only patient, they would have

nearly all their money back. They stood in a body outside the Bank door till the darkness sent them home worn out and sad at heart to bed.

There went out no boats that night from Harmouth to fish !

The morning following the day on which the Bank had stopped, a boat was seen some distance out making its way for the shore as well as it could with a broken mast and a ragged sail. All eyes were strained towards it. Whose could it be ? Where was it coming from ? Old Murtoch, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed silently out over the watery space. Then in a moment he dropped his arm exclaiming, "Well, bless my heart, if it ain't *The Saucy Jack*, with Joe and the kid aboard." Immense was the astonishment ; some said, "it couldn't be," but by-and-by, sure enough, the once trim little craft none the better for her buffetting in the late storm, glided in past the pier-head, Joe at the tiller and Johnny making himself useful in hauling in the sails. They both looked pale and weary, but the shout of welcome with which they were received roused them, and a gratified smile lit up both their faces pleasantly. When *The Saucy Jack* had been made fast, Joe and his boy came ashore. All were eager to tell him the news, but none liked to, for it was well known that all his savings were invested in the County Bank shares, and every single penny of his would thus be swallowed up. But he seemed to understand their whispering, and taking Johnny's hand, he merely said quietly, "I know all about it. It's been and ruined me, but that's neither here nor there," and then moved off towards home. But ere he had gone many steps he took

Johnny up in his arms, crutch and all, and carried him home, and up to his bed in his own tiny room. He would not undress him, for already was the poor little man in a heavy slumber, but laying him down tenderly on the outside of the counterpane, that great, strong man fell on his knees, and with his face resting on the hands of his sleeping child, thus remained for a long, long time. What he thought, what he prayed, what thanksgivings burst from his very soul, only the Book wherein his life is written can reveal. It was one of those seasons in the existence of a man when the days that are gone are lived over again, and the lessons they have taught are appreciated. Then the clouds roll back, the dawn breaks with promise of fine weather, and he nerves himself anew to face the future, bring it sunshine or storm. Thus taking courage, Joe Barton raised himself from his knees, no longer the craven and coward, afraid to meet the ills of life, but ready to grin and bear them. He was an altered man. And who had been the mysterious agent in the hand of Providence that had wrought his reformation? His poor little deformed child, who through the night of storm and danger had been near him with lion heart and dauntless courage, who had taught him that mercy is extended even unto him who would take his own life.

A few words more. Years passed on ; the expected call had been made by the Bank, and Joe's goods and chattels were all sold, but he neither groaned nor grumbled ; he set himself manfully to work once again, and though his hair grew grey, and he was not quite so hearty and strong as of yore, yet all were willing to lend him a hand, and he soon began to find his

circumstances improving. But for one thing he would have been happy. Johnny had never been thoroughly well since that dreadful night of storm and disaster ; his back had grown rounder, and he complained of a pain in his leg frequently. Joe grew very anxious : every spare moment was dedicated to his child. One day he took him to London to see a great doctor, and when he came back he looked ten years older, for there was a gloomy prophecy gnawing at his heart. From that day Johnny took to his bed. He was a good, patient little fellow, but he would have no nurse but his dear old daddy ; and his thin, pale face, used to light up the moment Joe entered the room ; and when his father sat down by him, he would put his hand into his horny palms, and smile as if he were supremely happy. One morning, on his return from fishing, Joe came in to breakfast, and as usual bounded upstairs to see his boy. Johnny was lying on his back, his eyes turned expectantly towards the door. The window was wide open, and a delicious soft breeze from the sea came playing in through it, and toyed with his hair. The sick child was going to his rest, there could be little doubt about that ; his eyes were unnaturally bright, his cheek strangely flushed ; in a few moments the ebb of the tide must set in. Joe sat down beside him, and then, as he was wont, Johnny put his hand in his, and slowly and quietly spoke thus :—

“ Dear daddy, I’m going home. The doctor was right when he told you I weren’t good for long. I feel as if I hadn’t got no blood in my body, and my legs feel so strange. Hold me up in your arms, daddy ; I want to whisper to you.”

Joe felt inclined to resist for a moment, for he was alarmed and would have gone for the doctor, but the child's manner chained him to his seat. Putting his arm round Johnny, he brought his head close to his shoulder. The dying child nestled himself to him, and pressing his lips against the big bushy whiskers, continued :—

“Daddy, don't lose heart again. Promise me that, won't you? Remember, daddy darling, the secret. I—I've kept it, you keep it too, won't you?”

Pressing his hands to his father's face, he looked eagerly into his eyes, passed his fingers over his cheek, and murmuring, “The secret, remember,” in a moment was dead.

They laid him in the corner of the churchyard, under the yew-tree, by his mother, and on Sunday mornings, after service, Joe has now to stand alone and gaze on the spot where rest the two beings he loved so well. But his secret is buried there too. What secret? That having received a letter to acquaint him of impending ruin, and found its information correct, he had sought to escape meeting his disaster by himself destroying the life that a merciful Creator had given him. How he was saved from this crime has been told, and the secret that was is a secret no longer.





Nellie's Fault.

"We sacrifice to dress till household joys
And comforts cease. Dress drains our cellar dry
And keeps our larder lean ; puts out our fires
And introduces hunger, frost, and woe,
Where peace and hospitality might reign."—*Cowper*.

STONILEDGE LIGHTHOUSE stood on a high promontory, familiarly known to the sailors who passed up and down channel as the Eagle's Beak. The great elevation at which it was situated enabled its powerful lights to be seen at an immense distance, even on the darkest and stormiest nights. And wide was the berth given them, for stretching away from the base of the cliffs beneath the lighthouse, some half-a-mile out to sea, was a long ledge of sunken rocks, concerning whose murderous exploits with unwary ships many a sad tale could be told. The extreme member of the reef was called the Witch's Comb—a name originating in its shape at the top—which once or twice during the year was just left visible above the surface of the waters by the vagaries of the tide. Stern and relentless its rocky teeth looked, with the morning sun shining over the sparkling sea only to find its rays fall dull and unreflected on the green and slimy sides, that went down sheer into dark depths, wherein the goodliest vessel that

ever floated would have found a grave spacious enough to hold it three times over. Up to the feet of the cliffs the water was fathoms deep ; in fact, Stoniledge reef rose from the bottom of the deep like a submarine chain of mountain peaks. Gazing down from the grassy downs above on to the placid waters beneath, their face as smooth as a looking-glass, it was difficult to imagine that but a few inches below the smiling surface an unseen enemy only waited his opportunity to deal death and destruction to gallant ships and their living freights. But he had had enough of spoil in his time, and after one winter during which he had been more than usually busy and successful, the lighthouse was established, a proceeding which was hailed with universal joy among seafaring people, to whom, though a somewhat tardy boon, it was none the less grateful.

Attached to the lighthouse was a cottage, in which lived Martin More, the keeper, and Joe Torrit, his under hand, with whom he shared the labours of cleaning, lighting, and watching the three great lamps that shone out so brightly at night from Stoniledge cliffs. A responsible and anxious duty it was, and one for which men of the highest character in every respect were only chosen. Martin was an old man-of-war's man, and as fine a specimen of the British tar as you could wish to see. Just turned fifty, his eye was as clear and his carriage as erect as if he were only twenty. In fact, the authorities chose him almost at once from amongst a host of competitors, so much were they prejudiced in his favour by his personal appearance. A right good fellow he was, looking upon life in its cheeriest aspect, and giving himself anxiety about only one person, his

little daughter Nellie. How shall I describe the child, with her lovely face, her winning ways, her weakness of character? she was a very Marie Stuart in short frocks and pinafores, whom everybody loved even when she was naughty. I am but a poor hand at drawing a portrait, and will content myself with saying, that she was the most extraordinary combination of goodness and naughtiness I ever met with in the journey of life. Sometimes she would seem devoted to her father, anxious to anticipate his every wish, ready to run here, there, anywhere, in obedience to his command; at others she would stay by herself, in the little kitchen of the cottage, where, ever since her mother's death, she had presided over the pots and pans and culinary operations, and looked quite angry if anybody disturbed her. In fact, it was not at all surprising that the one or two friends who came over from Sandbeach occasionally to see Martin, declared that Nellie was an incomprehensible little mystery; and even Martin himself would shake his head, and declare that "the child's ways beat me altogether." He was a fond and foolish father, far too much so, and the consequence was, that the young lady grew to regard herself as a very perfect piece of juvenile anatomy.

Only a few words of Joe Torrit, who completed the family party at the lighthouse cottage. He was the only son of a widowed mother, who lived at Sandbeach, a fishing village some four miles off, a sober, industrious fellow, to whom Martin was much attached, and in whom he placed the greatest confidence. Between them, as I said before, was divided the responsibility of looking after the Stoniledge lights, which not

only required cleaning, trimming, and oiling during the day, but had to be watched all the night through, lest any accident should happen to them. Summer or winter human eyes kept watch and ward beneath the blaze of light that flashed from the Eagle's Beak.

Nellie's gravest fault was her vanity. Though she was but thirteen she gave herself as much anxiety about her bonnets and dresses as the most fastidious lady of fashion. When I say bonnets, I mean bonnets. Hats she had long discarded as a great deal too juvenile, and in their stead she used to contrive the nattiest little bonnets imaginable, to the intense delight of Martin, who always treated her as a woman, and called her his "missus." And yet, despite all her labours, she had only one opportunity in the week of exhibiting her handicraft to public gaze, and that was on Sundays, when the venerable old grey pony was enticed by the most fraudulent means from his peaceful grazing on the grassy cliffs with much expenditure of persuasive words by Martin and knowing dodges by Joe, to undergo the labour of carrying the young lady and her papa in a ricketty old gig over to Sandbeach to church. Peeping Tom had an immense objection to even the one day's duty out of the seven, and would frequently exhibit a very strong inclination to make off, gig and all, to his favourite haunts and pastures green; but ultimately, though compelled into subjection, he would have his revenge by blundering along over the road at a pace that a respectable donkey would have been ashamed of; and on more than one occasion he had exhibited his appreciation of the sanctity of the day by performing devo-

tional exercises on the most flinty portions of the highway, to the sad disfigurement of his knees. However, every Sunday, as regular as clockwork, Martin and Nellie might be seen in the pew just under the pulpit in Sandbeach parish church, he in his best uniform, she spick and span as a new pin.

Oh, Nellie, Nellie, if you had thought more of what you had come into the house of God really for, and less of the bonnets and dresses and ribbons about you, the father who so doated on you would never have come to the trouble he did !

At the particular time of which I am writing, Martin had held the post of keeper at Stoniledge for nearly six years, and no complaint of any kind or description had ever been made against him. On the contrary, every quarter, when his salary was remitted him, a letter would accompany the cheque, expressing the highest approval and satisfaction of the authorities. A glad smile would light up his face when he received these flattering communications, and taking Nellie on his knee —a proceeding she sometimes objected to, on the ground that it was not sufficiently dignified—he would smooth her hair with his hand and whisper proudly to her —

“ They don’t think so badly of the old father, missus ; them great lords and gentlemen up in London. It’s what comes of a man doing his dooty. I’ve tried to do mine, and so I means to continue till my time comes.”

The end of November had arrived. The month had been singularly mild and fine, and the nights clear and starlight, and Martin and Joe both declared that they had never seen such weather for the time of the year in their lives before.

"But we shall catch it by-and-by, my lad," the latter would say, as he and his companion might be rubbing up the reflectors ; "we shall catch it by-and-by, and with interest, too ; you mark my words."

The 1st of December seemed like a miraculous confirmation of Martin's prophecy. The morning broke with a thick fog and a wretched, drizzling rain, which gradually seemed to wash away the mist, leaving a wide expanse of ocean to the eye. The scene was a very desolation of desolations : except far away on the horizon, there was not a single vessel in sight, a wilderness of waters met the gaze. The day sped on, the lamps were duly prepared and fixed ready for lighting, and Joe, Martin, and Nellie sat down to dinner ; after which the former would retire to have a sleep preparatory to his turn coming to watch during the first part of the night. Just as the meal was being finished a messenger came over from Sandbeach, in the person of the baker, to inform Joe that his mother had been suddenly taken ill, and, he feared, was dying. She had earnestly requested to see him. Martin at once accorded his permission for him to go, at the same time adding that as everything was ready, he need not trouble himself to come back that night.

"The poor soul will be glad to have you, my lad," he said, patting Joe on his back ; "and a matter of three or four hours more watching won't hurt me."

So Joe, with his heart full in more senses than one, departed in the baker's cart, and Martin and Nellie remained to look after Stoniledge lights.

It got dark very early, for the clouds were black and threatening, and the wind was moaning in an ominous manner.

"It will blow a gale afore morning, missus," said Martin, as he opened the door of the cottage to go across to light the lamps. "They're beginning their capers," he continued, looking out to sea, where the waves were already rolling heavily one on the other. The storm Spirit was rousing himself at last from his long sleep.

"Now, don't forget what I told you, missus," said Martin, as he turned up the collar of his coat. "Joe's away to-night, and so I don't mean to leave the lighthouse till daybreak, for fear that anything should go wrong. You'd best bring my supper over at half-past seven, as I wish you to go to bed early, for I shall want you up first thing to give me some hot coffee."

Then, as a gust of wind swept in through the door, almost extinguishing the candles on the mantlepiece in the kitchen beyond, he turned to Nellie, and kissing her on the forehead, passed across the little yard, and disappeared through the door of the lighthouse tower.

She was very sorry now he was gone, that she had not offered to sit with him; but then he did not like her to be in the watching-room when the lamps were lighted; besides, it was contrary to regulation, and so she closed the cottage door and made herself comfortable in the bright, cosy little kitchen, where the fire was burning away gloriously, and everything afforded such an agreeable contrast to the fierce war of the elements that was going on outside. Nellie was very busy, she had a new cloak in hand, that she wanted very much to

finish trimming this Saturday evening, in order to appear with all due magnificence in it at church on the morrow ; so down she sat at once, and resting her feet on the fender, stitched away, regardless of the wind and rain outside and the hands of the clock within. All was forgotten but the completion of the cloak, even the preparation of her father's supper.

Thus minutes and then hours sped by. Once she looked up, and then she saw that it wanted only a few minutes to half-past seven ; only a few more stitches that must be finished, ten minutes more or less would make no difference, and again she occupied herself plying her needle. Poor, vain little girl, could your eyes but have pierced the darkness, and seen something at the foot of the stone steps of the lighthouse tower, you would have thrown down the much-prized cloak with a shriek of horror !

At last her labours were accomplished : again she looked at the clock. The hands pointed to "*half-past eight.*" She started up in a fright, and immediately busied herself in getting together the eatables for her father's supper. Her conscience smote her as she reflected that she had had plenty of time to get something nice and hot ready for him, and instead of thinking of him, had only been considering herself. What would he say, too, at her being so late, he who was punctuality itself? Throwing on a great oilskin coat, that covered her from head to foot, she caught up the basket in which she had deposited the supper, and opened the door. The rain was still pouring in torrents, and the wind blew it into her face with blinding roughness. What was it that made her start back and tremble

all over like one with the ague? Why did she rub her eyes with trembling fingers as she gazed upwards through the driving sleet towards the lamps of Stoniledge lighthouse? Why such horror, such dismay? They were burning so faint and dim that they might as well have been out altogether. At the same moment on her ear fell the deep "boom, boom," sounding like a muffled groan from the direction of the sea. She knew what it meant, this mournful message borne on the wings of the storm. Something must have happened, and she could no longer stand hesitating there. She hurried across the yard to the little door that gave entrance to the lighthouse tower, and as she put her fingers on the latch, "boom, boom," again went the guns, as if upbraiding her for delaying.

Well, indeed, might she stand for a moment on entering, paralyzed with horror!

By the dim light of a small lamp, that spluttered and flickered and gave ominous signs of going out, she saw her father lying at the bottom of the stairs with a great, gaping wound in his forehead. It was evident that in hurrying down he had caught his foot, and fallen with such violence on the sharp edge of one of the stone steps, that he now lay stunned and senseless. With a terrified shriek Nellie threw herself down by his side screaming wildly for assistance; but who was likely to be at hand on these lonely downs on such a cruel night as this? The roar of the blast and the thunder of the billows against the cliff seemed only to mock her loneliness and despair. He was dead, she thought, and then she burst into a wild paroxysm of tears. But Martin had plenty of life still left in him, and pre-

sently his lips moved, and he murmured like one in sleep something about the lights. Then he made a vigorous effort to rise, but his strength was unequal to the task, and he fell back exhausted.

Nellie thought the night never would end ; the minutes seemed like hours, the hours like weeks. She had bound her handkerchief round her father's head, and the bleeding had ceased ; but he still remained motionless. Thus, through the dreary hours of darkness, alone and with no one to assist her, she knelt beside him watching, hoping. By-and-by the storm had spent its fury, and through the half-open door she could see the moon riding grandly over mountains of white, fleecy scud, and the stars making a hard fight to show themselves. Well was it for the toilers of the sea, whose path on the great waters carried them past the Witch's Comb, that snatches of light broke on them from the heavens, for the lamps of Stonledge lighthouse were out, and no warning rays shone down on the angry waves beneath from the tower of the Eagle's Beak. As the first grey streaks of dawn faintly appeared on the horizon, Martin, as if arousing himself from a long sleep, sat up, and passed his hand over his forehead. Then, as he felt the bandage, the reality of his position was plain to him ; he sprang to his feet and rushed into the yard.

" O God, it is true, they are out !" he cried, gazing upward toward the lantern ; and then, as if the exertion and agony of mind had been too much for him, he fell senseless on the gravel, his grey hair draggled in the dust and played with by the cold morning breeze.

When Joe Torrit came back, that Sunday morning, he found Martin crouching in his armchair over the fire, and Nellie bathing his head tenderly, and looking the most perfect little nurse in the world. In a weak and quivering voice he was told what had happened, namely that, anxious and frightened by Nellie's non-appearance with his supper at the appointed time the night before, Martin had hurried out of the watching room to see what had delayed her. He was very loth to leave his lamps for a moment, more especially as they had shown certain symptoms that told him they wanted looking to ; but he would be back in a minute and could give his whole attention to them. Still he was fit for nothing until he had assured himself that there was nothing wrong with his darling child. In his haste his foot had caught on one of the steps, and he fell, with the result I have already described. As for the lamps, his apprehensions were realized, for after spluttering and lingering on with a faint show of existence, they suddenly died out altogether.

"It's all up with me," Martin concluded, with a sigh that seemed to come from his very soul, "after forty years' service, man and boy, I've got on the rocks at last, and it won't be long afore I goes to pieces altogether. They ain't given to passing over neglect of duty up yonder, and I'm right sure to hear of last night's business. I'm a broken old man, and I don't care how soon I'm missing."

But he never blamed or said an unkind word to Nellie. Martin's anticipations were correct, and he was not in the least surprised, when some three days after he received a letter from the authorities couched in these terms :—

"LONDON, December 5, 18—.

"The Captain of H.M.S. *Seahorse* has reported that during the gale of the 1st inst. he was passing down Channel, and was much surprised at failing to discover any light on the Eagle's Beak. He fired four guns in order to attract the attention of the persons in charge of the lighthouse, but met with no response. Information to the same effect has been received from other quarters, and the authorities have sent down one of their officers to inquire into the matter. It is, therefore, expected that Martin More, the keeper of the said lighthouse, will be able to give a full and satisfactory explanation. Failing to do so, he 'will immediately be removed from his post.'

The gentleman who had been sent down to make the inquiry duly made his appearance, and turned out to be a lieutenant under whom Martin had served on the North American station. He was a genial, kindly man, and spoke with much feeling of the old days and the respect he entertained for his old shipmate. Everything was told to him without any concealment of any kind or description, and when he had heard it all to the end, he said, in a cheery voice :

"Well, Martin, we must see what can be done. The whole of this unfortunate affair seems to have been the result of accident; and," he added, turning with a knowing look to Nellie, "this young lady's too great love of finery. I think I may with justice advise that nothing more than a severe reprimand is necessary. And don't you think, Martin, that another hand to assist you is required ? "

What Martin's gratitude prompted him to say in answer to this it is unnecessary to relate here. It is enough for my purpose to state that such a report as his old officer had mentioned was ultimately made, and in due course Martin received a reprimand, and another assistant into the bargain; and he still remains the occupier of the cottage on the Eagle's Beak and the guardian of Stonileedge lights. The only unpleasant reminiscence he carries with him of that night, which was so nearly being his last, is a scar on his forehead that the doctor says he will carry to his grave. But he accepts it, like the stern disciplinarian he is, as a great punishment for his breach of duty in leaving the lights a moment unattended, even though for the purpose of satisfying himself as to the safety of his child.

And she? He who tells another's history finds no part of his task so pleasant as when he has to record how faults and follies have been overcome, and that his hero or heroine, as the case may be, gaining wisdom by experience, has become wiser and better. Thus improved and altered, we leave Nellie. She had but to look at the scar on her dear old father's forehead, and to feel that but for her vanity and weakness it never would have come there. The lesson she learnt through the long, miserable hours of that bleak December night of storm and tempest could not be set aside. She accepted it in a contrite spirit, and has obeyed its teaching ever since. The harvest was reaped in much bitterness and woe; but its gathering into the barn is with rejoicing and contentment.





Joey the Tumbler.

GARDENER'S Court, Bermondsey, was not what over-nice people would feel inclined to call a pleasant locality. It certainly had many drawbacks, among which the odour proceeding from certain adjacent soap and tallow manufactories played a conspicuous and by no means agreeable part. Added to this, its inhabitants did not live in that state of harmony which is so desirable, especially in a very narrow circle of acquaintance ; they had an unpleasant habit of settling their domestic as well as their public differences by muscular inducement rather than verbal persuasion, and the centre of the court just in front of the pump was the scene of many a fierce and long-sustained encounter. It may, therefore, be easily understood that Gardener's Court was scarcely the spot likely to be chosen as a place of residence by any one in search of peace and quiet ; indeed, mother often said that she would have been right glad to have left it, could she have found any other locality where the rent was equally moderate. But, as it was, at number twenty, in the corner of the court, on the second floor, mother, Lizzie, and I lived as long as I can remember ; in fact, I may say, on the very best authority, that

there I first saw the light, at least as much of it as was to be seen through a back bedroom window glazed with brown paper. I have also been informed that I did not make my first appearance in the world at the most favourable opportunity, as but a short time before my "*debut*" my father had most unaccountably disappeared from home, leaving my mother entirely dependent upon the trifling amount of money she was able to earn weekly by dancing before the enlightened and appreciative audiences of the Royal Whitechapel Theatre. As this in all amounted to some eighteen shillings a week, it was not a by any means too liberal income for the support of herself and Lizzie, a child eighteen months old, not forgetting the addition I made to the family expenses. But the Gardener's Court people were kind-hearted people with all their rough ways, and Kitty Jarvis (that was mother's name) was a great favourite amongst them, and so somehow or other they managed to lend her a helping hand; and Mr. Lawson, the manager of the theatre, who was very well in his way, kept on her salary, and thus she was able to tide over all her difficulties. At the end of the month after my advent into existence she was well and strong again, and back at her duties.

I must pass briefly over the first ten years of my life, merely stating that mother had got a rise at the theatre, and was in the fairy and princess line of business. She had induced Mr. Lawson to take on Lizzie, who was grown and very pretty, and that young lady soon danced and sang her way into public favour. As to father, we never heard anything of him; mother never mentioned his name, and if I asked her

any questions concerning him, she would turn the conversation off to quite another subject. This used to puzzle me greatly, and I wondered what mystery there could be about him that always brought tears into her eyes and made her so sad.

It was at Christmas time that Lizzie was first taken on at the theatre, and though I was of course very proud to see her looking so beautiful in her silver-spangled dress, with a gold crown on her head, I was very unhappy. Here was mother working and she working and earning money, while I was doing nothing at all, but munching the bread of idleness. Certain it was that this could not be right. I tried to think what line of labour was best suited to me. I wandered up and down the streets vainly hoping to be struck by some brilliant inspiration that should select for me the sort of work to take in hand. I would be a crossing sweeper, a shoebblack, a vendor of cherries, a seller of penny watches or tooth-combs. But as a crossing sweeper I should want a broom ; as a shoebblack, brushes and blacking ; in short, nothing was to be done without capital and stock-in-trade to start me.

One afternoon I was gazing with greedy admiration, at the window of a large confectioner's shop, when my attention was attracted by the "tum, tum," of a drum. Turning round, I was immediately entranced by the vision of a young lady, in a short frock and fleshings, on stilts, dancing to the music of a whistle and the before-mentioned drum, while an elderly man and a young boy went through some marvellous exhibitions on a piece of carpet laid down on the road. Not to waste further time, from that hour I was converted. No crossings

to sweep, no boots to black, for me : I must be a tumbler, and nothing else.

For six whole months, without saying a word, I applied myself diligently to perfecting my body in all kinds of muscular contortion; difficult and painful work was it, at first, but perseverance was rewarded, and at the end of the time I was astonished at my own success. But then came a new difficulty. Child as I was, it at first seemed an insuperable one. After all my exertions, to what use could I turn them ? One morning I went with mother and Lizzie, to rehearsal at the theatre: it was the day on which the pantomime for the shortly approaching Christmas was to be read to the company, and the parts distributed. I recollect the author well, as he sat in the middle of the stage. He was a pale sickly young man, with a terrible cast in one of his eyes, and was evidently suffering from an intense feeling of nervousness. However, he managed to stumble through his task, and then Mr. Lawson told each actor and actress what character they were to sustain. Mother was to be *Fairy Fortune*, and Lizzie, *Queen Lady-bird*. Oh how I envied them, and only wished there was something for me. When all the parts had been allotted, and Mr. Slowquill (that was the author's name) was rolling up the manuscript, Mr. Lawson suddenly called,—

“ Why, bless my heart ! there's no one to do *Quicksilver* ! ” and sure enough *Quicksilver* had been forgotten. Some discussion ensued, and Mr. Lawson suggested the cutting out of the character altogether—a proposition which Mr. Slowquill did not appear quite to like. At length, with the most unblushing

effrontery, I stepped out from behind mother, and offered my services.

"Why, bless my heart!" said Mr. Lawson, looking me up and down through his gold double eyeglass, "the child must be mad. The part will want some one well up in acrobatic business."

"Well, so I am," I stoutly answered, and, determined to strike the iron while it was hot, I proceeded to give a taste of my quality, by turning backwards, head over heels, from one side of the stage to the other, finally squatting down with my head between my legs, looking Mr. Lawson full in the face.

"Bless my heart!" I heard him whisper to Mr. Slowquill, "the young un's got it in him; shall I give him a trial?"

"Certainly; of course," said that gentleman, glad not to have to cut out one of his characters.

"He'll have to learn the metallic shiver," continued Lawson, half addressing me.

"So I will, if you will teach me, or show me how," I replied; an answer that clenched the bargain. My name was put down for *Quicksilver*, and mother was to have ten shillings a week for my services. She was very pleased at the welcome addition to her income, more especially as it was quite unexpected, for I had never practised my tumbling, except when she and Lizzie were away at rehearsal. We spent that evening so happily together, and mother laughed and chatted more than I had seen her before.

Boxing night came. The last touch had been put to the scenery, the last drop of oil to the machinery for working the

grand transformation scene, everything was in readiness to reveal the beauties of Fairy-land to the eye of the Whitechapel play-goers. At length the hour for the performance arrived, and no sooner were the doors open, than every nook and corner of the house was crowded with the usually uproarious Christmas audience, who began to shout and stamp their feet the moment they had taken their places. Then the band began scraping their fiddles, preparatory to commencing the overture. Mother, Lizzie, and I, were standing at one of the wings, all ready-dressed to go on. They both looked so beautiful, and as I held them by the hand, I felt so proud of them. At that moment the stage-door porter came up and said, "There's some one at the door as wants to see you particular, Missus Jarvis."

"But I can't come, Jones," answered mother. "It won't do for me to go, dressed as I am."

"Well, I thought I'd best come and tell you," growled the surly Cerberus, and with that he moved away.

Mother looked very thoughtful, but suddenly she moved quickly away, and I saw her catch up an old cloak and wrap it round her, and go in the direction of the stage entrance. She was absent about ten minutes, and by that time the overture was over, and the curtain had risen. When she came back she was pale as death, so much so that one of the scene shifters standing by said,—

"Lor, missus, how awful white you do look. You'd better have a drop of summat afore you goes on."

This remark appeared to restore her to a sense of her position; she seemed to set her teeth closely together, and then

in another minute she was on the stage, and in a few moments I followed her. Despite my nervousness and deep sense of the publicity of my position, my eyes would keep fixed on my mother's face. I watched hers in their turn, and I saw them earnestly directed to a box on the stage, behind the curtain of which a man was seated, watching her intently. I was certain they knew one another. Who could he be? He looked much like a foreigner, his hair was long, and shaded his forehead, and a heavy beard and moustache almost hid the lower part of his face. His dress, too, was somewhat peculiar in appearance, and bore all the marks of colonial tailoring. In fact, he might have been a wealthy New Zealand sheep farmer, or a gold digger—for all this happened in the early days of Australia's fame—fresh from the Adelaide fields. When mother went off, I still saw her with her eyes fixed on him, and presently looking furtively round to see if any one was watching her, she pressed her lips upon her fingers, and her very soul seemed to go with the kiss she breathed towards him. After that I lost sight of her, and it was not till the transformation scene that I saw her again.

Slowly were folded back the clouds of gauze that hid the beauties of "*Queen Lady-bird's Fairy Home;*" soft was the music played, as one by one the rolls of flimsy stuff disappeared, leaving a brilliant mass of tinfoil gems bare and glittering; and loud and prolonged was the applause of the audience when the glories of the whole scene were revealed. In the centre, supported apparently by a chain of roses, but in reality, by a strong iron suspender, mother and Lizzie hung in mid air

in a kind of floral cradle, beautifully constructed. A strong electric light was thrown upon them, and gave the whole scene a most enchanting appearance. The good fairy, who always comes on at this period to change the Good Young Man into harlequin, and the Naughty Baron into clown, and so on, had already commenced delivering the customary speech, in which "soon" rhymes with "pantaloons," when a sharp crack, like the report of a pistol, was heard, and in a second more, the cradle in which mother and Lizzie were seated came down with terrific force on the stage, with what effect I will not attempt to describe. Mr. Lawson at once shouted out, "Drop the curtain," but ere that could be done, the foreign-looking man was on the stage at mother's side, supporting her head upon his knee, and bending tenderly over her. Then down went the roll of painted canvas, shutting out this thrilling life *tableau* of human suffering.

Lizzie and mother were both carried home to the second floor in Gardener's Court, and laid bleeding and moaning on their beds. The doctor soon came, and was hopeful. Bless him for that, and the earnest, watchful attention he showed staying through that bitter winter's night, tending them with all the skill and kindness for which his noble profession is so famous.

Five o'clock in the morning came; I looked out of the window, and the snow was falling heavily. Mother and Nelly were sleeping soundly owing to the influence of a soothing draught that had been given them. The fire was burning briskly, and the doctor, who was sitting in a chair beside the

grate, with me on his knee, trying to soothe me to sleep, was gazing thoughtfully into the embers, when a knock came at the door. The doctor rose and opened it, and who should enter but the foreign-looking man I had seen at the theatre. The doctor's look seemed to say, "Who are you?" and the stranger understood it, for going to mother's bedside, in a voice broken with suppressed emotion, he said,—

"I've a right to be here, sir. I tried to keep away, but it weren't a bit of use. I couldn't abear the thought that my poor gal and her little one were dying, without my so much as saying good-bye. I ain't been what I ought—I knows that. I've been a vagabond—a thief," he added with an effort, as if the word stuck in his throat; but I ain't forgot my poor lass,—I ain't forgot my poor lass;" and with that, he buried his face in the bed-clothes and sobbed like a child.

The doctor said not a word in answer; patting me on the head, he rose quietly from his chair, and whispered, "I shall go and smoke a pipe, at the door downstairs;" and he added, "Come for me if I am wanted." I could see the tears in his eyes,—great, kind, soft eyes that they were.

And this was my father, and thus it was that he came home! I shall not dwell on the details of how, when he had mastered his emotion, he rose from his knees and came to the fire and told me who he was. Looking me full in the face, with an eagerness that frightened me for a moment, he slowly said,

"My lad, I know you're my lad, for you've got her eyes;" and then he kissed me so warmly. "Tell her when she wakes that father has been here, to kneel once more by her side, and

that broken-down, disgraced convict that he is, he still loves her. Tell her this my lad, and may the blessing of your lost, hunted-down father go with you." Then quietly kissing me again, he glided into the next room, where Lizzie was, and then he came back again and pressed his lips to mother's forehead. At that moment the door was pushed violently open, and a rough-looking man blundered in. Instinctively, father put his finger to his mouth in token of silence, but the intruder would not be hushed.

"It's no use, Jack Jarvis," he muttered surlily. "I've been after you a bit too long to be gammoned by any more of your artful dodges. I've been on your track better 'an twelvemonths, and now I've got you I mean to keep you, so just let me slip on the bracelets and don't make a noise, or I shall have to call up my mate as is waiting down below." Without a word, father rose from his knees and put out his hands, and I saw something slipped over them that fastened them together, while the man continued,—

"That's right, I'm glad you've made up your mind to take things comfortable. They're in a wonderful hurry to have you back at Freemantle, for there was an awful row when you managed to make off as you did. Come on now, and don't stand spooneying there."

Imprinting one last kiss on mother's forehead, he came up to me, and putting his lips close to my ear, whispered, "God bless you, my lad, remember my message;" and in another moment he was gone.

Still mother and Lizzie slept on, knowing nothing of what

had passed ; as for me, overcome with fatigue and all that I had passed through, I fell on to the floor in a state of unconsciousness.

By God's mercy, the two sufferers, after a long and tedious illness, recovered. Mr. Lawson was very kind and good to us, and a subscription was got up that enabled us to meet all our wants. As for myself, I still continued at the theatre, and with such success that I was by-and-by removed to one of the fashionable houses at the West-end, and found myself in the receipt of a largely increased weekly salary. Three years after the accident at the Whitechapel Theatre and my strange and short interview with my father, mother was one day looking out of the window, when I saw her turn suddenly pale, just as she did on that terrible night, and put her hand to her head as if in pain. I was rushing towards her, when the door opened, and in a moment more father held her clasped in his arms.

"I've come back, Kitty, I've served my time. I'm a free man now," he cried.

What more can I tell ? I have not found that the sins of the father have been visited on the son ; on the contrary, I have prospered exceedingly in my humble way. Every mail from New Zealand brings me a letter from those dear ones over the sea ; himself, mother, and Lizzie, who in that new country have shut up the smeared and blotted pages of his past, seeking to redeem them by being useful in their generation. Who should dare to say that no good can be found in him who has once, and once only, committed a crime ?



Wanted a Stitch.

HE villagers of Long Staunton differed in no respect from other country folk. Though the sum total in population of the pretty hamlet, including babies, amounted in all to little more than fifty souls, there was chattering and gossiping enough to have done honour to a metropolitan suburb ; and old Toker, the parish clerk and undertaker, was often heard to declare "that he never clapped eyes on a more scandalous, mischievous lot of women." This was perhaps a trifle too severe; still, certain it is that the female portion of the inhabitants were always acquainted with one another's most private and domestic affairs ; and if Giles, the horseman up at Cайдge Farm, happened to have had a few words with his good woman at breakfast, the fact was speedily known throughout Long Staunton, and duly magnified as it passed from mouth to mouth, till by the time it reached the farther end of the village it was authoritatively stated "that he had given her a black eye." As can be readily understood, the results that occasionally followed were not calculated to promote harmony in the particular establishment whose inner life had thus been exposed to public gaze. There was, however, one person residing within their circle of observation, who baffled all the

efforts of the Long Staunton gossips to pry into his proceedings, and that was the gentleman who lived in the small cottage close by the church. Beyond a passing salutation to some of those whose faces had become familiar to him, he had never entered into conversation with anybody since he came, five years before, and took up his abode in the village. All that had to be done out of doors in connection with household matters he left to his little daughter Edith, who was his sole companion and attendant, and with the exception of whom no one ever entered inside the cottage. All that was known about him was, that his name, or at least the one he gave, was Arthur Bellingham, and that he seemed to be poorly off, to judge from the smallness of his dealings with the butcher, who came over twice a week from Harlesdon, and his keeping no servant. Edith Bellingham was one of those children who become prematurely aged through responsibility being thrust upon them. This little girl of fourteen winters—I had almost said summers, but sunshine and fine weather had not fallen to her lot—though so fragile in figure, so childlike in face, had all the thoughts and feelings of a woman, and had often lent strength to her father's heart in its hour of darkness and gloom. And they were many. Arthur Bellingham's face always wore the shadow of a great sorrow; there was no light in his eyes, no colour in his cheeks, he was as one with whom the past is ever with him, in shape and form as of a fiend who spies and dogs the footsteps till the victim would fain rush upon his persecutor and murder him. But memory cannot be silenced save with death !

The cottage wherein Edith and her father lived their lives away, was a pretty little place, and owed much of its neat appearance to her. She it was who tended and nailed up the honeysuckle over the porch, and took care that the curtains at the two bedroom windows were clean and white. I wish some of the little girls I know could stand over the washing-tub lathering and wringing the linen as she did. And yet, perhaps, it is better not ; we grow old soon enough, and hard work and washing tubs are not delayed. Heaven help us, even the rattle and the doll are worthy regret, though if they break, it costs but a few pence to restore them. But the days come when the toys and playthings are of greater value, and all the gold in the world cannot replace them.

About nine o'clock and a summer's evening ! Arthur Bellingham was sitting in his arm chair by the open window that led into the small garden at the back of the cottage. Edith sat on a footstool at his feet, her hands clasping her knees and her face turned upwards toward his with an expression upon it full of tender love and devotion. Though the gathering darkness concealed it ; though no eye could see it even in the broad daylight, there was an unseen chain that passed from her heart to his. " Honour thy father and thy mother ;" even those venerated words spoke but one half the sympathy and affection that Edith concentrated on the gloomy, silent man beside her, who was gazing fixedly on the thundercloud gathering in the horizon, with a look that seemed to envy the heavens the coming storm, when they would shake off their anger and blackness to awaken in the morning untroubled and serene. And now

the wind that had seemed to sleep for the last fortnight, began to whisper among the leaves, and a few heavy drops warned those who were out of doors to hasten under shelter. A short interval, then heavy rain and thunder and lightning !

Edith would have closed the window, but her father moved not, save to place his hand gently upon her head, and smooth her hair. He seemed absorbed in watching the conflict of the elements; still were his eyes fixed on the black cloud that from the size of a man's hand had now spread itself over nearly the whole expanse of sky. Presently his lips moved, and stretching out his arms towards the growing darkness, as if to draw some one thence to his embrace, he wailed out passionately—

“ Darling, come to me ! I was not guilty, indeed I was not. How could you think me so when I swore to you I was not. Put your hand on my face as in the old happy times, and say something loving to me. Oh, come to me, come to me ! Do not shrink from me, or I shall die.”

Then as he uttered these last words, he leant eagerly forward as if to snatch hold of something, and then exhausted by the effort, sank back in his chair with a groan.

In the sudden flash of lightning that had illumined the room and the garden outside with the brightness of day, Arthur Bellingham fancied he saw Edith's dead mother standing before him ; for his brain was weak, sore trials had played havoc with his mind, the weight of their bitterness had crushed him down, and though he was no madman, the past with him was as a horrid dream, whose wakening had left him broken in spirit, hopeless, and, worse than all, purposeless. This was why the

Long Staunton gossips thought him so strange and incomprehensible; this was why the child Edith, full of cares and responsibilities, was a woman when others of her age were not yet emancipated from the schoolroom.

And yet a stitch in time might have saved all this. But how?

* * * * *

Into that past whose experiences had been so bitter for Arthur Bellingham, we must now look, for therein may be read the story to which what has gone before is but the moral.

A good sixteen years before the night of the storm must be travelled back, a species of journeying, that can only be indulged in by the imagination, to the time when Arthur was a bright, happy lad of nineteen, the only son of his father, a large mill-owner and manufacturer in the well-known town of Widney, in Blankshire. The young gentleman had only then just left Rugby, but Mr. Bellingham, sen., was one of those men, who consider that the true secret of success is to start early in business; and much to his son's disappointment, announced to him his determination not to send him to the University, but at once to place him in the counting-house under his own eye.

Arthur by no means coincided in the paternal views, and at first made a grand show of resistance; but Mr. Bellingham, though devotedly attached to his boy, was only the more firm and resolute with him, and threatened to cut off his allowance unless he at once complied with his wishes. So the obviously weaker party of the two was compelled to

yield and to surrender the hope of fulfilment of the anticipations he had formed of the jolly times he would have at Oxford in the company of his old schoolfellows. Still, though thus driven to submission, he took care to enjoy himself as much as circumstances would allow him, in and about Widney, and at all the balls and croquet parties within anything like a reasonable distance, old Bellingham's son and heir, as he was called, might always be found. He was gay, accomplished, and amusing, and found favour wherever he went.

Now, though I am going to have a few words to say about love-making, I promise you they shall be very few indeed, for I am sure my young people would only think me a bore, and I would not for worlds run the risk of forfeiting their good opinion, if I have already gained it. Whether or not Arthur was to blame for so doing, he nevertheless did fall in love, and that with some one so ill-suited to him in point of position, that he ought to have known better. It is quite true that she was lovely in face, and good as she was beautiful ; but the distinction between a mill-owner's son with prospect of several thousands a year, and a factory girl, is considerable, and all the love in the world cannot remedy it. Arthur, though he tried to shut his eyes to the fact, knew perfectly well that the union he contemplated with Ellen Verner was an ill-assorted one, and would irrevocably offend his father. But as a runaway horse blindly rushes to his own destruction, he surrendered himself to the current of his inclination, casting prudence and discretion to the winds, and ran away to London with Ellen, where he was married to her, with the handsome balance of ten

pounds remaining in his purse after all expenses had been paid, to live on till Arthur's ship came home.

For a week they were supremely happy !

When Mr. Bellingham was informed in a very penitent letter left behind by the truant son, of what he intended doing, he made no disturbance, burst into no fit of violent passion, but simply called in his chief clerk, and ordered him to remove the office-coat that Arthur used to wear, which was hanging on the door of his private counting-house, and the same evening called upon his solicitor and altered his will. The son had not been mistaken when his heart told him that his father would never forgive him. Never ! That is perhaps, too hard a word !

It is necessary that I should say here, that the house in which Mr. Bellingham resided in Widney adjoined his offices and counting-house, and that a door led from the one to the other. Often when the good townspeople were fast asleep in their beds, the owner of Lorton Mills would wander into his business room, and opening his iron safe, add up columns and columns of figures, till a casual observer would think they would have blinded him. But when he had satisfied himself with this strange amusement for his hours of relaxation, he would look up quite fresh and with sparkling eye, for he knew that he was far and away the richest man in those parts. Sometimes when more money had been received than usual in the course of the day, he would have out his cash-box, and count bills and bank notes and gold and silver over. Mark Bellingham had known once what poverty was, and that know-

ledge made him a miser. His favourite substitute in the evening for his coat was a faded old dressing gown, that fastened with a tassel at the waist, which he said was more easy and comfortable than anything else. Like himself, it had seen a good many years' service, but he clung to it with the tenacity of old acquaintance, and the housekeeper declared that she believed he would leave directions in his will that he should be buried in it. It had only one pocket, and that was on the left breast side, and was intended for a handkerchief. Mr. Bellingham's fingers were always too busy for him to require side-pockets in which to put idle hands. One morning he rang the bell for the housemaid, and told her to mend the inside of his pocket, for there was a hole in it, and his handkerchief had slipped through into the lining. She said, "Yes, sir," but forgot all about it for a long while. This was somewhere about six months after Arthur's rash marriage, and that indiscreet young gentleman and the partner of his fate began not only to feel the pangs of poverty, but the pangs of hunger. He had managed to pick up a precarious existence by writing for a new evening paper, at a ridiculously cheap price; but through the coldness of an unappreciative public, it collapsed, and at the end of the week in which it came to its death, Mr. and Mrs. Bellingham, jun., were in the agreeable position of being in London without a penny in their pockets. The young husband was at his wits' end, in what direction to turn for support. At last he screwed up his courage, and said to his wife, "I will go to my father and see him. Perhaps the sight of me may revive his love, and he may help us."

He had to walk all the way from London to Widney. Mr. Bellingham, in his dressing-gown, was in his office, his cash box at his side, counting, according to his custom, the day's receipts. It was just after the quarter, and a great deal of money had been paid in to him since the morning. The clock in the dining-room (which was audible, for the door of communication between the house and the counting-house was open) was striking eleven, when there came a ring at the front-door bell. He had nearly finished his task, and was holding in one hand a letter that he was reading, and in the other a bank note that had evidently come as an inclosure. The summons at this late hour startled him, and putting down the letter, he turned to the front door and opened it.

The interview between Arthur (for he was the visitor) and his father need not be pondered over. "As you have made your bed so must you lie on it," was the cold, unchanging answer, that met every appeal for assistance and forgiveness, till the poor lad, wearied out and heart-broken at finding a stone where he might have hoped for bread, sank prostrated and fainting on the floor. For a moment Mr. Bellingham was alarmed, and he hastened for some wine and water. He was much annoyed to find that the chiffonier, in which the former was kept, was locked, and what was worse, the housekeeper had the key. He ran with strange speed up the stairs and knocked at her door. It took some moments to arouse her, but at last he received the key and turned to go down, when he heard the front door closed with a slam. "God help the lad, he cannot have gone out of the house," he said to himself; then hot, strong, in full

flood came the tide of repentance over him, but only for a few seconds. Mark Bellingham had far too good a conceit of himself ever to admit that he had been in the wrong, even in his communings with self. A little less gold and a trifle more heart would have made the owner of Lorton Mills a better and, I fancy, a happier man.

His surmise was correct. Arthur had gone; on recovering from his momentary faintness he stumbled to his feet and staggered to the front door and then out into the night, glad to escape. He preferred rather to trust himself to the tender mercies of strangers than to the pity of a relentless father.

When Mr. Bellingham had satisfied himself that his son had taken his departure, he gave a sigh of relief, and proceeded to finish the work in which he had been interrupted. He took up the letter he had put down and read it carefully through, then folded it up and looked about as if searching for something. The contents of it informed him of an inclosure with it of a bank note for £100. But where was it? He turned all the papers and notes over in the cash box, looked under the table and all over the floor, everywhere in fact, but it could not be found.

Then a thought budded in his mind, and grew, and grew till in fewer moments than I can write it, Mark Bellingham had arrived at the conclusion that his son was a thief. His visit at so late an hour, his want of money, and then his weakness, his fainting so well simulated, and his abrupt and sudden departure, were undeniable evidence of his guilt. Yes, my children, when

you grow older you will learn that even the most innocent acts appear suspicious when regarded with a preconceived determination to believe in guilt.

A good deal of excitement was caused at the Blankshire assizes when Arthur Bellingham was tried for stealing a £100 Bank of England note, and his father appeared in the witness box as prosecutor, and gave evidence against him. Not a few people said that considering Mark's wealth and the ordinary feelings of a parent for a child, that he might have hushed the matter up. But the Widney mill-owner was ambitious of being looked upon as a second Brutus, and what testimony he had to give he gave without faltering or hesitation. Arthur had asseverated his innocence of the charge ever since he had been taken into custody, and vehemently urged it to the jury, asking them how they could believe him guilty when he was arrested only the next day, and no money of any sort or kind was found upon him. But the learned judge, in summing up, pointed out that a thief very often took the earliest precautions that nothing should be found upon him in case of capture, and often had a kind friend to whom he entrusted and with whom he shared the booty. The jury looked wisely at one another, and after five minutes deliberation returned a verdict of guilty, and the prisoner was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment with hard labour.

Mark Bellingham returned home to Widney with the self-consciousness that however painful it might be to him he had done his duty. He was singularly polite and kind to his household, and praised the housemaid for having remembered

to mend the pocket of his dressing-gown, which laudation was scarcely deserved, for she had forgotten to do it for several days, and had only recollected her master's order that very morning.

Ill news always flies apace, and her husband's trial and conviction soon found its way to Ellen's ears, who since her return from a visit to Arthur in prison, had been laid up on a bed of sickness at St. Christopher's hospital, to which she had obtained admission through the earnest endeavours of the parish doctor, who had found her dying in a dirty garret in Drury Lane. This last blow was more than she could bear, and she lived only long enough to bring the child Edith into the world, and then went to rest in the land where all troubles and sorrows are forgotten.

When Arthur had served his period of punishment and came out of prison, the first thing he sought was his baby, and he found that she had been adopted by the wife of one of the dressers in the hospital, who had no children of her own, and had become devotedly attached to the poor lonely little thing. So he left her there till such time as he should have a home to take her to, and went out into the world to seek employment. Hard as it had once been to get, how much harder was it now with the brand of crime upon him. But fortune favoured him at last, he secured the post of messenger to a large warehouse in the city, where, by his industry and honesty, he worked on to gain the confidence and esteem of his masters. But he was always a gloomy, silent man, nor smile nor bright look ever was seen on his

face ; he performed his duties conscientiously and to the letter, but all the while more as a machine than a man. When the head of the firm died, he left Arthur an annuity of £100. It was time that something came to him, for his fellow-servants began to wonder at his strange ways, and some openly said that they believed he was a trifle cracked.

With the money he had left him, he sought out his child, and with her came and took up his residence at the little cottage in Long Staunton, where we found him. And Edith was good and tender, and baby though she was, often lent strength to him in his hours of melancholy. For there came power to her from heaven, and with that all things are possible.

* * * * *

The morning following the storm, dawned cloudless and serene, and was marked by an extraordinary occurrence. Just as Edith and her father were finishing breakfast, a carriage and pair drove up hurriedly, the horses covered with foam, and the vehicle itself splashed all over with mud. The servant jumped down from the box and opened the door, and then assisted an old man to descend from it, who moved with the greatest difficulty. Arthur looked eagerly out of the window, then a strange flush came into his cheek, and he put his hand to his heart as if he were in pain. Edith was at a loss to understand who this strange visitor could be, but she at once went to the front door and opened it. And Arthur followed her and stood upon the step.

Slowly the old man toiled up the little path that led from

the gate to the door; then, as he neared it, he raised his eyes and beheld father and daughter. With a wild cry he fell down at Arthur's feet, shrieking almost, "Arthur, Arthur, forgive me!"

Thus it was that Mark Bellingham came back to the son he had condemned to ignominy and shame, to the prisoner's dock and the prisoner's cell. Where was all his vaunted self-pride now? Fled, as he felt the shadow of death falling on him; fled, as he remembered what the good preacher had said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged;" fled, loathed, cursed, when in the lining of the old dressing-gown, after fourteen long years, was found the £100 bank note, for stealing which he had consigned his son to a felon's dock, and stood up before all as his accuser. Thus God punished and brought down this man, so mighty in his own estimation, and humbled him even to the feet of the son he had so wronged.

My children, it is even on such a trifle as a stitch in time, that a man's fate, honour, everything, may depend. The servant who forgot to obey her master's order and to sew up the hole in his dressing-gown pocket, through her idleness and forgetfulness brought shame and misery to an innocent fellow-creature. And yet how slight the part she has played in my story!





Barnie's Little Wife.

"Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear ;
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there."

—Shakespeare.

SHE certainly was the strangest little creature that ever breathed, with features so perfectly developed that people would never believe she was only twelve years old. Such snow-white skin, such large soft eyes, just like a fairy for all the world; and such a queer, old-fashioned mite, too, for though, to look at the expression of her face she might have been twenty, you had but to shut your eyes when she was speaking, and you would have thought that a woman of fifty at least was talking. But her precocity made her only the more engaging and fascinating, and the good people of Hartleigh were never tired of declaring little Ethel Somers to be a marvel of humanity, a prodigy in mortal shape.

Who was this paragon of children? The question comes as a matter of course, and I hasten to answer it. Ethel Somers was an orphan, living under the roof and care of her aunt, in the big red brick house in Hartleigh High Street. Concerning her parents she had no recollection; for the night she came into the world her mother passed out of it; while her father, who



was organist at the parish church, died when she was scarcely a year old, leaving her and the settlement of his debts as a legacy to his unmarried sister, Martha Somers, the dearest, kindest old-maid to be found in the United Kingdom. A faithful legatee, indeed, she proved; she paid her improvident brother's bills, and took his lonely child to her heart of hearts, concentrating every hope and affection upon her. Thus it was that Ethel grew to regard her in the light of father and mother both.

Martha Somers was a woman possessing a very large share of that most valuable quality, sound common-sense; and remembering the unfortunate vacillation and weakness of character that had blighted her dead brother's career, she determined as far as possible to provide against anything like an inheritance of it in his daughter. Thus brought up, and being always in the company of her aunt, Ethel's temperament was moulded much after the same fashion, and she learned the value and importance of self-reliance. With such influences surrounding her, no wonder she became so sedate and womanly, and began to appreciate the exigencies of life when other girls of her own age were dressing their dolls or turning their skipping-ropes.

But who was Barney? Well, he was neither Irish, nor of Irish extraction, as the name would imply. Barnard Freeman, senior, was, as all his fathers had been before him, born in the High Street, and brought up at the grammar-school, Hartleigh; and it was at the last-named of these two places that Barney, his son, as he was called by his familiars for brevity's sake,

was being duly birched and rulered through a good sound English education at the time we make his acquaintance. A tall, good-looking lad, just turned fourteen, with a manly, straightforward way about him that insured his popularity both with his masters and his school-fellows. They always felt they could trust him. Besides this, he had shortly before saved the life of one of the grammar-school boys, of the name of Morton, who had very nearly been drowned when bathing in the Hart, and would have been to a certainty but for Barney who, coming up opportunely, jumped in just as he was settling down among the weeds, and after a fine tussle with the greedy waters, managed to struggle with him to the bank. So courageous a deed naturally much enhanced Barney's reputation, and raised him to the position of a hero, where he was idolised in a way flattering enough to turn an older head. At first he did get a little vain, but that was soon knocked out of him by Ethel, who gave him a fine scolding for trying on his airs and graces with her.

Having thus described my young people, I come more immediately to my story. Barney and Ethel had been accustomed to play together from the time she had been able to run alone. Perhaps though, I am wrong in using the term played ; I should have said that they had always been great friends ; so much so, that the Hartleigh people used jokingly to call her Barney's little wife. Miss Somers on her part rather encouraged the friendship than otherwise, for Barney was a great favourite with her, and she saw no reason why they should not grow up together, and, ripening in one another's society, find on some

distant day that the attachment of childhood had imperceptibly been changed into the love of maturer years. She may have been a silly old thing to allow such thoughts to enter her brain, but then old-maids are supposed to be more foolish and romantic than the rest of the world. Thus carving out the destinies of these two children, and building castles in the air for them, she would sit watching them in the twilight of the summer evenings, listening to the latest news of school and school doings, with which Barney would always keep Ethel fully acquainted, and in which she was always greatly interested. Sometimes he would read to them, on which occasions the young lady would take up her position on a footstool beside him, and even go the length of resting her head on his knee. Often he would continue thus amusing them till the growing darkness made the printed lines run one into another, and the big glass bottles at the chemist's over the way flashed into sudden and gorgeous illumination. Then sometimes her father's spirit of music would seem to possess Ethel, and through the deepening shadows her childish notes might be heard gently rippling out some old ballad that she had taught herself. At others the three would remain silent, listening to the bells wrangling and jangling through their weekly practice, their wild melody echoing with such strange feeling through the still night air. Ay, there had been many changes rung from the old church tower, and would be still !

It was drawing very near to the Midsummer holidays, and the grammar-school boys had already begun to count the hours to "breaking-up." Only two days more of examination, and

then six weeks' idleness. Barney, I am sorry to say, did not cut at all a good figure, but found himself very imperfect in his work, and consequently anticipated anything but a high place when the result of the week's labours should be made known. But, as he saw no use in making himself miserable about it, he was as jolly as ever, though inwardly determined to redeem his position at the first opportunity. Ethel too had found very serious fault with him.

"You naughty, idle boy," she said; "I hope you will get a good flogging, and not be allowed any holidays at all."

At which kind expression of feeling the young gentleman was highly amused, and when he came in in the evening, pretended he had been punished as desired, and with such an appearance of truth that Miss Somers' sympathy was so excited, that she forthwith sent out for a lobster, and spiced some elder wine, to support Barney under his supposed misfortune.

Close behind the houses of the High Street ran the river Hart. It passed just at the bottom of Miss Somers' garden, and Ethel was very fond of wandering down to the water-side where she had a favourite seat in the midst of a clump of willows. Here she delighted to hide herself with a book, and enjoy the solitude. The last day of the examination had come, and in the afternoon the prizes would be distributed, and the grammar-school boys dismissed for the vacation. Ethel, taking advantage of the lovely morning, and leaving her aunt, who was busy with certain household affairs indoors, strolled down to her hiding-place by the river, with her lessons. She had been sitting working away hard for some

little time, when she heard voices on the opposite bank, one of which she immediately recognised as belonging to Barney.

"Well, Morton," he was saying, "whatever have you brought me all the way here for?"

"Don't speak so loud, Freeman," some one answered, in a frightened and agitated tone; "we might be overheard."

"Well, there's no need to be alarmed," interrupted Barney; "we're not saying anything to be ashamed of, are we? But whatever is the matter with you? you're as white as a sheet."

"Freeman," continued the other, "I've asked you to come here because I'd no one else I could trust in. You saved me from drowning, and—"

"Well, go on," cried Barney, impatiently.

"Oh! don't speak to me like that," exclaimed Morton. "I am wretched enough already, and if you get angry with me I couldn't stand it, Freeman. I stole Mr. Mortimer's purse off the table in his room this morning."

"You did what?" shouted Barney.

"I stole his purse," was the answer; and then, more hurriedly—"The door was open as I passed along the passage, and I saw it lying on his dressing-table, and I thought of the money I owed Mother Brown for 'tuck,' and I crept in and took it. And, oh! Freeman, I have been so wretched ever since, and I want to return it. It would break mother's heart if she knew what I had done, and father, I believe, would kill me." Here he burst into a wild fit of sobbing, and added, in a voice almost inaudible with emotion—"Help me, Freeman; do help me, and tell me what I am to do." There was a silence

for some few moments, which was presently broken by Barney. He spoke very slowly and quietly. "The best thing you can do," he said, "is to go to Mr. Mortimer at once, tell him all, and ask forgiveness."

"No, no, I cannot do that," was the answer; "I have spent some of the money, and I have been so much in trouble this half-year that I know he would never forgive me. I feel inclined to throw myself into the water."

"Don't do that, Morton, or I shall have to pull you out for the second time," said Barney; "but, hush, there is some one coming along the bank; let us move out of the way."

Then Ethel heard no more. Her heart was beating fast at the revelations to which he had been an accidental auditor. As she came forth from her hiding-place to go into the house, she saw the two boys walking slowly along the river's bank in close conversation; while coming from the other direction might be seen the portly and familiar form of Jenkins, the police constable, stationed at Hartleigh. Then it was too late, all was discovered, and Morton could not escape! No time for him to appeal to Mr. Mortimer for mercy; justice was already on his track, and his fate was sealed. "Poor fellow," thought Ethel; "but he is a thief, and he deserves no pity," she added to herself. "But his mother, if she knew it, would break her heart." The words echoed in her ears, and as she passed up through the garden into the house her eyes were wet with the tears of pity, and she cried softly.

"Why does not Barney come to tea, as he promised?" said Miss Somers, on the evening of the same day, as she turned the

tap of the urn, and the hot water rushed hissing and steaming into the tea-pot. "It is nearly seven o'clock, and he should have been here at six."

"Oh, I dare say, Auntie, he has found something to do he likes better," exclaimed Ethel, with a toss of her little head; but then, recollecting the scene of the morning, she added, "perhaps there may have been something to keep him up at the school-house."

"Well, there's no knowing," said Miss Somers, "so we had better have our tea;" a suggestion which was at once carried out. Eight o'clock, nine o'clock, and still no Barney. During the interval, Miss Somers had wondered at least a dozen times what could have become of him, and had gradually excited herself into a painfully nervous and fidgety condition, suggestive of pins and needles in every portion of her anatomy. Suddenly there came a violent ring at the front-door bell, and immediately afterwards the servant brought up a little note, which she handed to Ethel. Eagerly she tore it open, and read as follows:—

"DEAR ETHEL,—I have been taken up for stealing a purse from Mr. Mortimer's room, at the school-house. I am not guilty, but must *wait* to prove it, as were I to do so at once some one else might get into trouble. I want him to set himself right before I say anything. I am writing this at the police station at Manningford. Don't be frightened. I shall be safe back again to-morrow night. I am not guilty, Ethel. I know you will believe me, and dear Aunt Martha, to whom

give my very best love, and accept the same yourself.—
BARNEY."

"Barney arrested, and for Morton's theft!" There was some hideous blunder, some dreadful mistake; she would go at once and tell all she had heard in her hiding-place among the willows. But then, as she read Barney's note over again, she paused when she came to the words "must wait to prove it, as were I to do it at once some one else might get into trouble. I want him to set himself right before I say anything." She was terribly perplexed what she ought to do. Perhaps if he knew that she was aware of Morton's guilt he would wish her to keep silence until Mr. Mortimer had been seen, and his forgiveness obtained, and yet what good could that do? She felt in great trouble ; if she could but see Barney, he would tell her what he wished. Miss Somers, when she heard what had happened, working herself into a state that ultimately ended in hysterics, her head taking up a graceful position among the fire-irons, and her feet entangled among the bars of her easy-chairs. From this position she was only recovered by the plentiful application of cold water and smelling salts, after which she was forthwith removed to her bedroom in a very feeble and exhausted condition.

The lovely summer's day had ended with a coarse, tempestuous night ; the wind howled and groaned through the chimney-pots of the High Street, and the rain dashed in an unceasing torrent on its pavement. But Ethel was thinking of neither wind or rain ; Barney, her dear old friend Barney, was in trouble, and she wanted to see him, to ask him what he wished her to

do. Manningford was five miles off; how was she to get to him? for, thoughtless of everything but his safety, she had determined to dare the elements and go to him. Thus resolved, to her childish heart delay seemed full of danger; and so, wrapping herself in her thick cloak, and putting on an old hat, she stole quietly downstairs, just as the clock in the hall struck twelve. With trembling fingers she drew back the bolts, and opened the door. As she did so, a violent gust of wind, blowing against it, almost knocked her down, and it was with the greatest difficulty she managed to shut it after her. It made a good deal of noise in closing, but the roar of the blast and the rushing of the rain prevented its being heard, and brave little Ethel hurried forth into the pitiless storm.

Day was dawning when the policeman on duty at the Manningford station was roused from a snooze over the fire, in the back office, by a knock at the outside door. On opening it, he found a little girl, dripping from head to foot, and shivering with cold.

"If you please, sir, I want to see Barney Freeman," she said on the instant.

"Poor little lass," exclaimed the kind-hearted officer, dragging her inside. "Come in and dry thyself; thou'rt soaked to the skin a'most."

"But, sir, I want to see Barney," pleaded Ethel, struggling with him, for it was she and no other.

"Thou shalt see him all in good time," was the answer; "but first come and dry thyself."

Thus persuaded, Ethel went with him into the room where

the fire was. She was wet through, so that her clothes clung to her with chilling tenacity, and she shivered like one with the ague. The good-natured policeman was at his wits' end to know what to do. There were no women or women's clothes about the place, and the child was like enough catching her death of cold as she sat steaming by the fire. At length a bright thought struck him, and bringing in a large blanket and an overcoat, he told Ethel to take off her wet things and wrap herself up and lie down before the fire.

"But Barney, sir ; you promised me I should see Barney," entreated Ethel.

"To-morrow morning, my poppet," was the answer, and with that he shut the door and left her.

For a long time Ethel sat gazing into the fire, wondering at the strange step she had taken in coming to Manningford, and what good was likely to follow from it. After all she might just as well have remained at Hartleigh, and waited till her testimony became absolutely necessary for Barney's safety. She had trudged through five long weary miles this stormy night ; and now, as the morning was dawning, awakening her to reflection, she was at a loss to understand for what purpose she had taken the journey. Still there was consolation in the fact that she would soon see him ; and thus solacing herself, a sort of stupor crept over her, and she sank on to the blanket in front of the fire.

It may appear strange that Barney had been taken up for stealing Mr. Mortimer's purse, when, as we well know, it was Morton who was guilty. It came about in this wise. Shortly

after the conversation Ethel overheard had been resumed, Barney, failing to induce Morton to make a clean breast of it to Mr. Mortimer, determined to save his friend at all risks ; so, taking the purse from him, he put it in his own pocket, with the intention of restoring it unobserved to Mr. Mortimer's room. Unfortunately however for him, Jenkins, who had overheard some of the conversation, and witnessed the receipt of the purse by Barney, without more ado took him in charge, and, having locked him up in his room in High Street, went off for Mr. Mortimer. As for Morton, no sooner did he see the policeman's uniform than he took to his heels and ran off. The purse being found in Barney's possession, and his refusal to give any reasonable account of how he had come by it, was conclusive proof to the astute Jenkins that he it was who had stolen it ; while Mr. Mortimer, who would have prosecuted his own son under a like suspicion, was determined to punish the accused. Barney said nothing ; he felt sure that sooner or later Mr. Mortimer would relent ; and in the meanwhile a judicious appeal for forgiveness by Morton, who he did not doubt would confess now that he had got into trouble for him, would no doubt result in the triumphant proof of his innocence, and the hushing up of the guilt of his companion. Thus it was that he came to be locked up in Manningford station, preparatory to his examination before the magistrates on the morrow.

With this much of retrospect we come back to Ethel, who woke from her heavy but unrefreshing sleep to find the sun high in the heavens, and every appearance of the day being

far advanced. She tried to rise ; but her legs refused to support her, and she fell back exhausted with the effort. Poor child! she was frightened ; she had never felt so before. Once more she essayed to gain her feet by the help of a chair; but all the power seemed to have left her limbs, and with a moan she sank down once more.

Cruel storm, look at the tiny bark your pitiless rage has wrecked !

Can it be, that shattered on the shore of the silent sea, whose waters lately roared and hissed in angry contention, the shaky timbers will fall away to utter destruction, so that those who journey over the deep shall find no vestige remaining? Barney's innocence was proved beyond all possibility of a doubt by Mr. Mortimer, who came over the first thing in the morning, and privately explained to the magistrates what had in truth taken place, for Morton had confessed all to him, his own guilt and Barney's noble self-sacrifice. So the brave boy was called into the private room, and having been complimented for his generous conduct, was about to go back to Hartleigh with Mr. Mortimer, when the good-natured policeman came up to him and said he had some one who wanted to see him. Who that somebody was we already know.

The wheels of time have rolled on some four months : Barney has returned to the grammar-school, and is working hard, but he is a good deal changed in manner ; he has become very quiet, and talks very little. What has caused this alteration in his character ? Ethel is ill ; the exposure and cold on the night when she walked to Manningford, laid the foundation

of that disease whose deadly process is but a matter of time. Day by day those who loved her felt their hearts torn as they heard the short choking cough grow more and more troublesome ; they knew that consumption, more than usually rapid, was hastening its patient uncomplaining little victim back again to the bosom of her God. Nor word nor regret ever fell from her lips ; a blessed calm seemed to have fallen over her, and prepared her for the worst, and towards all that attended on her she was more gentle and affectionate than ever. The old love for Barney still remained ; still was he her most favoured companion, and he on his part dedicated every spare moment from school to be with his little wife. It was winter now, cold bitter November, and Miss Somers kept fires burning all over the house, so as to keep it warm for Ethel. How can I describe the sadness of those long evenings, when Barney would come in, and the three would sit talking till it became time for Ethel to be carried up to bed, for she was too weak to walk ! Then Barney would take her up in his arms, and carry her so carefully. Always before he went away at night, he was called up to say good-bye ; and she would say, "Barney, I want you to say 'Our Father' with me." When Martha Somers heard their voices mingling together, a great lump would rise in her throat, and many and many a time she was obliged to leave the room to hide her emotion. One night the usual trio were assembled in the drawing-room, Miss Somers in her arm-chair by the fire, Barney on the sofa, and Ethel resting her head against his shoulder. She had been very quiet all the evening, for Barney had been reading to them ;

but now he had finished, and was talking cheerfully of the approaching Christmas holidays. The clock struck nine, and Miss Somers, rising from her chair, said, "Ethel, my darling, it is time for bed." "Oh, let me sit up a little longer, Auntie ; I don't feel at all tired, and I like to hear you and Barney talk," said Ethel. Then, as if to lend force to her request, the church bells burst forth into noisy melody. Back they brought those happy evenings, when Ethel was well and strong ; and there were tears in Barney's eyes, and in Martha Somers' too, when they remembered. But Ethel only smiled, and whispered, "Dear old bells, how I love to hear you ; you seem always to talk to me so kindly." Then, passing her hand over her forehead, she nestled her face close to Barney's, and closing her eyes, seemed to be oblivious of all but their music. On they wrangled and jangled, now loud, now low, till an hour had nearly passed. Miss Somers was dozing, and Barney was sitting quite still, lest he should disturb Ethel. She was asleep now, and it would be a pity to arouse her.

The noisy bells had ended, and silence reigned over Hartleigh : Miss Somers started from her nap in a great hurry, and said, "Ethel, you must go to bed."

No need for a bed now for her, save that last resting-place for the sleeper whose wakening shall find her in that bright country over those distant hills of azure sky. Ah ! Barney, your little wife is lost to you ; lay her head down gently, and pass out into the starry night, where your tears may mingle with the lately fallen snow. Cry on, my boy ; child though she was, she loved you, as the sacrifice of her life proved.

Thus quietly did the end come to Barney's little wife. Brave little girl, with heart of gold, your reward is not here ; as the shattered lily on the headstone over your grave, so your life-chord was snapped asunder as the flower fadeth !





Left Alone.

"No hap so hard but may in time amend."

SOUTHWELL.

LOOR MOTHER ! They told me—that is, the two or three kind-hearted women who lived in our court, and had shared between them the duty of nursing her through her illness—that she was going home ; and perhaps, even before the morning dawned, she and I, who loved one another so dearly, would be parted never more to meet this side the grave. I was but a boy of nine ; and yet, as they soothed and caressed me, and whispered words of comfort and consolation, I heeded them not ; my heart—she had moulded and fashioned it so tenderly—was yearning for her, whose spirit, now hovering on the bank of the dark river, was silently awaiting its summons to cross the stream. She lay on her bed so quiet and motionless, her long golden hair was flooding loose and disordered over the pillows, and her pretty face—for she was a very young mother—as calm as a summer sea. I knelt by her ; I held her hand in mine ; for a moment it disengaged itself, and gently stroked my face ; her lips moved, as if to say, "God bless thee, my child !" and then the breeze died away, and the waters were hushed into rest for evermore. Thus it was she was taken, and I was left alone.

She had been all in all to me ; I had known no other friend or relation. With the exception of the people who lived in the court, I had no recollection of our associating with any strangers ; we had seemed to live alone and isolated from the rest of the world, as if we only existed for one another. Who or what my father was, she never told me. Once, child-like, I pressed her to do so. She answered me, the only time I ever remember her doing so, impatiently and angrily. I felt it pained her, and I inquired no more.

But a few days more, and I saw her quietly laid to rest in the great cemetery, close to whose walls railway life ebbs and flows with its daily noise and bustle. As I heard the rattling trains go shrieking and whistling past, it seemed like leaving her in company ; I went back to the lonely room we had so long shared, but there was no mother now. Then it was I knew the worst !

They were very kind to me, those good motherly souls who had nursed her ; but they were poor, and had children of their own, and what claim had I upon them ? So it came to pass that the day week after mother had been buried, I found myself wandering about the London streets in search of food and shelter. The sum total of my worldly goods consisted of the clothes I had on my back, a shilling (all that remained after the rent and funeral expenses had been defrayed), and an old pocket-book, filled with faded letters that I had not taken any particular trouble to examine, having preserved it solely because mother had always carried it about with her and seemed to value it. My capital to start with was therefore not very

extensive ; besides which, I was too young to know how to apply it to the best advantage ; for, unlike the boys about our court, I had been brought up with much care, never being allowed to run wild in the streets, to educate myself in "pitch and toss" and other equally improving accomplishments. On the contrary, mother had taught me to read and write, and would never allow me to go out except with her. So it may easily be imagined that I felt very helpless and lonely.

When she died, Christmas was not far off, and holiday folks had already commenced to enjoy the pleasures of the festive season. Cabs laden with luggage, and filled with smiling and happy occupants, were hurrying about ; the grocers' shops displayed in their broad plate-glass windows all their most tempting wares ; presents for Christmas, good things for Christmas, met the eye everywhere ; the whole of the great city seemed to be at peace and good-will within itself. But I was wretched, and the general joyousness only tended to depress me ; it seemed more than ever to realize to me my orphan condition. I crept into a quiet street, and sat down on a door-step ; for I could not prevent the tears from coming. I buried my face in my hands, and had a good cry, and thus I remained for a short time, but was aroused by feeling a cold nose rubbing against my knuckles. I looked up quickly, and beheld standing before me such a big, disreputable, dirty, black-and-white dog, wagging his tail and evincing the deepest sympathy for me. That part of his coat which should have been white was smudged and grimy ; in fact, his whole appearance suggested that he had known better days, but at the time of our meeting was leading a decidedly

vagrant life. There was something singularly intelligent in his look, as he sat on his haunches regarding me with apparently affectionate interest. He seemed to be saying, "Poor little boy! I can feel for you ; for, like you, I have no friends, no home." The sympathy of the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind was on me too, and I accepted its promptings. From that moment Ben (such was the name I gave him, and he caught it up as if by inspiration) became my philosopher and guide and friend. When I rose to move in obedience to the order of a policeman, he followed close at my heels, and this sealed the contract of mutual friendship between us.

It was a raw, bitter day ; the snow that had been falling had now ceased, leaving the streets almost impassable, for the mud and slush that had been beaten up by the traffic was beginning to freeze, and horses could scarcely stand on the slippery surface. Everybody seemed in a hurry to be indoors, for it was getting dark, and the lamplighter had already commenced his evening rounds. Where was I to go ? I could not keep on wandering about the streets any longer ; my feet and hands were numbed with the cold, and I had had nothing to eat all day. The shilling must be broken into, and that at once—a resolution I immediately put in force by going into a baker's shop and buying a loaf. In the discussion of this Ben duly assisted me on the steps of a half-finished house, through whose windowless passages the wind cut with knife-like sharpness. Ere we had finished our meal, it began to snow again, and I was glad to take shelter inside. In a corner of one of the rooms I threw myself down on some shavings, tired in body and sick at heart.

It was quite dark now, and the cold seemed to become intenser every minute and to pierce me through. Poor Ben, too, felt it as much as I did, for he crept close to me and huddled his nose away under the flap of my jacket. I covered him up in the shavings and myself too, and, making him into a pillow, was soon in the land of dreams. How long I slept I know not, but when I awoke the sun was shining brightly in at the window, and I could hear vehicles rattling past in the street outside. The town was evidently up and doing. I shook off the shavings, in which proceeding I was copied by Ben, and then we two in company emerged from our night's lodging for another day of vagabond life. The first consideration was breakfast, so I paid a second visit to the baker's for a loaf. As it was handed to me, I felt in my pocket for my money—*it was gone!* What I said, how I felt, need I record? It was hard, was it not? A few more such straws as this, and the child's back would be broken. Oh Ben, Ben! had you been as watchfnl as your gratitude should have made you, you would have seized hold of the ragged urchin, who crept in the moonlight, when you and I were so soundly sleeping, and stole my money.

It came to begging at last, and for a week I managed to support my companion and myself on promiscuous charity; but it was cruel, heartbreaking work, asking alms: so many would pass by without a look, others with an angry "Get out of the way, do!" that it was difficult to avoid feeling dis-couraged. Up to Christmas Eve from the day mother was buried, I had not slept in a bed, and that was nearly a fortnight. But I had not felt that so much as the daily exposure to cold

and damp, which had brought on me a cough that at night was a great trouble to me and kept me from sleeping. I could not tell the utter desolation of those waking hours, with no companion save my own thoughts and Ben, who, poor dog ! was always as tired as myself, but was able to do what I could not—sleep soundly. Was God ever going to desert me thus ? would He not give me some relief from my sufferings ? This I often asked myself. It may have been wicked to do so, but it was irresistible.

Christmas Eve ! This time last year mother was sitting in front of the blazing fire, with me on her knee, telling me fairy stories ; and now I was crouching up on the straw of an empty wagon, with nothing between me and the blue sky, where the stars were trembling in a vast azure sea. I had felt very ill and weak all day, and a racking pain in my head had made me scarcely sensible of what I was doing. Ben seemed to fancy there was something wrong, for he would not lie down, as was his wont, but in the moonlight I could see him sitting close by me on his hind-quarters, gazing hard at me. Whether dogs always do bay the moon I know not, except that he uttered no sound ; all he did was once or twice to lick my hand. Such a frost there was that night ! but I felt it not : my temples were burning, and my hands also ; my eyes seemed like two hot coals, my throat was parched, my lips so dry that the skin peeled off them. Ben seemed to have grown the size of a bullock, and had great horns sticking out of his head. I tried to grasp hold of them, and after that remember no more !

My first recollections of returning consciousness recall to mind the long, cleanly-kept hospital ward, in which, as I afterwards learnt, for nearly five days I had been in a state of partial insensibility. As for myself, I remembered nothing since the night in the wagon ; I felt as if I had passed through a long sleep. I put my hand to my head ; it was closely shorn, while an icy-cold bandage was fastened round it. I asked the nurse what had been the matter with me, but she kissed me and told me to be quiet. Yes, she kissed me ; and I was so weak and low that her kindness made me quite hysterical, which resulted in my being taken in her arms, and quieted with all that gentleness of word and action that makes some women so loveable.

Brain fever, that was what had been the matter with me ; and, when I got stronger, Mrs. Murtoch (that was the nurse's name) told me that it had been a very near thing for me, and that the doctor had once or twice despaired of getting me through it, as I had remained delirious so long.

"But, the Lord be praised, you're getting on finely now, my chickabiddy, and will soon be able to stand on your legs again."

"If you please, ma'am," I inquired with patience, "can you tell me how Ben is ?"

"Ben? Good gracious me! no. I'm not acquainted with any Bens," was the answer.

"Ben is a dog, ma'am, if you please," I offered, by way of explanation—"my dog, ma'am."

"Your dog! what did you want with a dog? Mercy on

us! you were as near starved as could be, let alone having a dog to feed," she replied.

"But, ma'am, he was very fond of me, and he used to keep me so warm at night; and oh! I hope he isn't lost. I should be so sorry if he was."

No doubt the worthy nurse thought me the most ridiculous juvenile she had ever had under her charge. To have passed through a most terrible illness, brought on entirely by exposure and want of food, and then for my first inquiry to be about a dog, probably suggested to her that the brain fever had not, after all, been got over without leaving unfortunate effects behind. So she told me I must not talk too much at first, and left me to speculate as to the fate of my canine companion. But I renewed the subject the moment she came back, and finally extorted from her a promise that she would make inquiries of the people who had brought me to the hospital.

Ben was all safe and well at the yard where I had been found lying in the wagon. So far I was satisfied; but I longed greatly to see him, and was determined I would at the first opportunity. I was getting quite strong again by this time, and Mrs. Murtoch got me up and dressed me one morning, and took me into her room, telling me to sit still, and not try and move about. I had nothing to do, and felt very much inclined to disobey her orders and walk to the window; but it struck me I might amuse myself by looking over the old pocket-book and the letters it contained. I took it out and opened it, but it slipped from my fingers, and all the

papers fell to the ground. I picked one up—it was peculiarly soft and thin. I unfolded it, and, to my intense astonishment and delight, discovered that it was a Bank of England note for £10. So poor mother had not left me so penniless, after all, and here had I been walking about with it in my pocket, when it might have saved me all the misery and suffering I had undergone. Now, as I looked at it, it seemed like a little fortune, enough to keep me through all future years.

But the letters! I read them as best I could; for, though I was a very good hand at print, my education had not progressed very far in the deciphering pen-and-ink composition. But I stuck to my task, encouraged to go on by what I learned. When I had come to the end, I knew who my father was, and why mother never liked to speak of him. In those half-dozen faded sheets of paper, her story was told. The outline at least was unmistakable, the rest has since been filled in. It was shortly this: She had been a work-girl in a large factory in Manchester, and, when only sixteen, attracted the notice of her employer's eldest son, who, like herself, was very young. His love was as pure as his intentions were honourable, and ere she was seventeen, and when he was only just entering his twenty-first year, they were married. The wrath and indignation of the old man brought upon him a very severe stroke of paralysis, which left him unable to move, but as bitter as ever against the young couple, who by this time began to experience the hardships and embarrassments consequent on a failure in pecuniary resources. Henry Darnell (such was my father's name)

determined to make one last appeal for forgiveness, and that in person. Leaving my mother at the quiet little fishing village, where they had remained ever since his marriage, he started in the hope of being able to assert the old power which the love between himself and his father had originally given him. But he was doomed never to reach him. The train in which he was journeying ran off the line, and a young widow slept in that sea-side village that night, all unconscious of the awful tidings the morning would bring her. The old man relented when it was too late; he sought her far and wide, but she had disappeared, none knew whither, and, despite the most careful search, he never could find a single trace. Near or about that time, she took up her abode in Sillings Court, in a certain district of London not necessary to mention, and supported herself by needlework. There it was I was born, there it was that I saw the light fade out of her eyes, and watched the breath of life die away within her. And of all this was I instructed by the faded letters and memoranda in the pocket-book, that at one time I had thought of throwing away as useless rubbish. It was startling news for a child of nine, and it was not till some time afterwards that I fully realized and understood how important it was. Still I had wisdom enough to keep my own counsel, biding the time when matters should be brought to a satisfactory issue. Folding up the letters, I put them carefully away in the pocket-book, together with the certificate of marriage of my parents, which I had also found in it.

I had scarcely accomplished this, when I heard a great

deal of scrambling and pushing in the passage, and the door was suddenly burst open violently, and in rushed Ben, nearly upsetting Mrs. Murtoch and the basin of arrowroot she was carrying for my especial edification. He knew me in a moment; and his expressions of joy were so forcible and exuberant, and the wagging of his tail so violent, that not only did he nearly knock me over, chair and all, but threatened wholesale and sudden destruction to some beautiful china flower-pots full of geraniums, in which Mrs. Murtoch took especial pride, and amongst whose fragile stalks he did terrible mischief. Whereupon I had to assert my ancient authority, and my canine subject forthwith sat himself down, and was transformed in a twinkling from Ben the noisy to Ben the respectable. He was such a gentleman too now, so spruce and nice, with his shirt front so spotlessly white and his coat so glossy. As he looked at Mrs. Murtoch, his eyes were so loving, and his tail wagged once again, but this time with the more subdued emotion of gratitude. I had not much difficulty in guessing who it was that had taken care of him and fed him so well.

Three weeks more, and the doctor told me that I was quite recovered and must leave the hospital. I received his intimation with much regret, for Mrs. Murtoch had been like a mother to me. That last evening she took me into her little sitting-room, for, being the chief nurse and superintendent, she had good accommodation. After we had had tea and buttered toast, which latter was very nearly all consumed by Ben, who, having eaten to satiety, stretched himself in

front of the fire and slept, the dear old soul, with a great deal of stuttering and an equal if not larger proportion of hugging and kissing, informed me "all of a heap" that she knew I was a poor little orphan, and that she was going to adopt me. To morrow morning I was to go down by the train to Bolton-on-the-Sea, where her sister lived, who would keep me in her house till she had her holiday from the hospital and could come and fetch me.

"And," she added, "Ben is to go too, though he is the most tiresome troublesome dog I ever did see." This she only said in order not to appear too overpowering in her kindness, for, as regarded the individual mentioned, she petted and fed him to such an extent, never omitting to pay him a visit at every opportunity, that he was becoming almost aldermanic in his proportions. What answer could I make to this generous and unexpected proposal, but to throw my arms round her neck, and give her a plentiful shower-bath of tears? And she began to cry too, what for I did not then know, unless it were sympathy; but she afterwards told me of an only son she had lost at sea, and perhaps it was of him she was thinking. When I went to bed that night, I knew God had no longer deserted me, for through the darkness and storm He had found me a new home and a new mother. Ere I had left her, I placed in her hands the pocket-book, the letters, and the £10 note. Could I have kept anything from her?

The fresh air of Bolton-on-the-Sea soon brought the roses into my cheeks, and I was but a very short time in picking

up my health and strength. Mrs. Murtoch's sister was every bit as good and kind as herself, and admitted me to the full privileges of a member of the family, which consisted of a little girl aged ten and a boy some two years younger. Her husband was a fish-agent, that is to say, he represented two or three large fishmongers in London, for whom he would buy at the morning auctions of fish on the beach. They were comfortably off and no more; there was plenty of good food, but no luxuries. Sam Birchett was one of those men who never forget the rainy day that may come, and was careful accordingly.

Ben had a fine time of it; when he was not eating, he was scampering over the sands; when he was not scampering over the sands, he was in the water; in fact, he was as idle a dog as could be found anywhere. He had become a very general favourite among the visitors at Bolton-on-the-Sea, especially with those who frequented the old jetty that stretched out some little way into the sea. He certainly was a most wonderful dog for the water, and was as strong and enduring in his swimming as a Newfoundland. The consequence was, that whenever he and I made our appearance, he was, so to speak, appropriated for the purpose of fetching out sticks, that were thrown in to induce him to display his natatory powers.

One day it was blowing very fresh, and the Bolton-on-the-Sea pleasure-boats were without customers. Cruising a short distance from the shore might be seen a tiny cutter, looking like a cockle-shell as it danced about on the waves. She

belonged to a very old and infirm gentleman, who came every year during the spring, and spent most of his time sailing about in her. He had no other companion than one manservant, who combined the duties of valet and sailor, sometimes wheeling the old man's bath-chair on the land, and trimming the sails of the little yacht on the sea. The aged stranger was very reserved and taciturn; he scarcely if ever spoke to any one, and then only in monosyllables; but he would always go out in his boat, despite wind and weather, if the mood took him, though the sailors often would shake their heads, and mutter warnings about unexpected puffs of wind from the cliffs under which Bolton-on-the-Sea was situated. The old gentleman would get into trouble, they said, before he had done.

It was trying work for the little craft, and, though she rose like a cork to the crest of the waves, and sank as a sea-bird in the valley of the waters, she looked as if a breath more would turn her over. Presently her head was turned for the shore; for, however much he might like the wind, the old man did not care for rain, and already a wretched drizzling mist was beating before the breeze. She came bounding on straight for the jetty. The wind now caught her sails sideways, and seemed to turn her almost completely over.

"The old gent must be short of his buttons," said a sailor, almost angrily. "Why don't he have that main-sheet lowered away, instead of cracking on so? It's a-tempting Providence, it is. By the Lord, they're over!" he exclaimed, springing forward, and then, turning quickly round, he ran down the

jetty, crying, "Come on, lads, and help me get a boat off; there ain't a moment to be lost!"

It was true; the tiny cutter was now capsized, and nothing could be seen but her keel, which was floating uppermost. Then a man's grey head appeared above the water, and then another. They were but a few yards from the jetty. I could see them both struggling with their giant adversaries, who came rolling on, sweeping them towards the shore, and then they sank again. Where was Ben? He was gone from my side; but where was he? Beating the waves with his brave old paws, his black head fighting over the billows towards the drowning. The boat was not yet launched from the shore. Heaven help ye, poor souls! for only can aid come in time from the four-legged swimmer, now so close at hand. My eyes seemed gifted for a moment with unnatural power. I saw the courageous dog make a snatch forward; for a moment he disappeared, but when he next showed himself there was some heavy weight in his mouth, with which he was struggling for shore.

It was over. Ben had done his work as no human being could. But when the dripping body of the old man had been laid down on the beach, the brave dog sank exhausted beside the inanimate form. Some took up the former and carried him home, where, in a few hours, he was sitting up, recovered, though very weak; the latter soon came to, and I was obliged to take him away to avoid the caresses with which he was almost smothered. As for the old man's servant, he sank to rise no more.

Ah, Ben, it was a good day when you and I met, my man ; your want of watchfulness, when my money was stolen, has been fully compensated for and atoned.

The old man sent for me and Ben, and we had a long and interesting interview. As I was leaving, he said, "Remember, you are to bring Ben to see me every day." This I was quite willing to do, as he had spoken very kindly to me, and so promised and kept my word. One day when I went in, he was reading a letter, the envelope of which was lying on the floor ; I picked it up, and as I handed it to him, my eye fell on the direction. It was "Henry Darnell, Esq., Marine Terrace, Bolton-on-the-Sea." I said something which made the old man ask me what was the matter.

"Your name, sir," I answered ; "that was my father's name, but——"

"Your father's name?" he interrupted, seizing me by the hand and looking hard into my face. "Tell me, child, what you mean—explain, explain!"

His vehemence frightened me, and I remained silent.

"Speak, speak ! for God's sake speak, boy; I am in an agony !" he continued. The tears were filling his eyes ; there was an unusual flush on his cheek.

I told him the story of the faded letters.

His arm was round my neck, his hand was smoothing my hair, and, through a voice broken with emotion I heard him murmuring thus : "God, I thank Thee that Thou hast not sent my grey hairs down to the grave without the wish of

my heart being fulfilled. The search of a sorrowing old man has, though late, not been in vain."

Mrs. Murtoch was sent for, and came down with the letters and the old pocket-book, which fully established my identity. Not that my grandfather ever doubted it ; he was satisfied from the first.

Thus through wind and storm, through penury and sickness, had an inscrutable Providence guided me in safety, making even a dog an instrument towards the accomplishment of my destiny. Wealth, position, happiness have been spread at my feet ; and but for Ben they would never have come to me. What has my experience taught me ? That in the smallest and commonest actions of life, God's hand is at work to direct and guide.

Mrs. Murtoch is still alive, and comes often to see me and my wife ; for many years have passed now since the events recorded in this story occurred. My grandfather has gone to the land where all things are forgotten, leaving me sole heir to a large and rich property.

What of Ben ? Dear reader, if I say that the question brings tears into my eyes, you will not think me weak and silly. The brave, faithful dog is at rest too. But he lived to a good old age, and then passed out of existence without pain. May I venture to hope that, if you love my dear old dog, you will spare a tiny piece of regard to me ?







Lisette's Birthday.

"Her smiles and tears had passed, as light winds pass
O'er lakes,—to ruffle, not destroy, their glass."—*Byron*.

HE traveller who wanders through Normandy, when he reaches Avranches, will be sure and rest him here awhile to enjoy the beauties of its scenery. Taking up his position on the summit of the wooded eminence on which it is situated, and turning his eyes towards the sea, a glorious natural panorama will be unfolded before him. Forest, corn-field, river—green, golden, glittering ; and then those deadly, engulfing sands, so greedy and treacherous, stretching right away far as sight can follow, and smiling so smoothly in the sunlight up into the grey granite face of Mont St. Michel, that rising like a huge Elfreet from the bed of the river's estuary, frowns threateningly on all around it—a huge monument of Nature's handiwork.

Some years since, in the little village of Ardevon, but a short distance from the verge of the sands, lived the widow Meyer, as her neighbours called her, though that was not indicative of any great originality on their parts, considering her good man had only gone to his rest some three years before. But it answers the purpose of introducing us to her as the pale, active,

strong-minded Breton woman we see sitting in the porch of her rambling old farm-house, calling out impatiently in a shrill voice, "Lisette! Lisette!" Looking at her, the observer would have said that she was between thirty and forty, for she had few wrinkles, and there was plenty of colour in her cheeks. And yet, in truth, she only failed fifty by some six months, and she used to laugh cheerily and say that her hair underneath was getting dreadfully grey and thin, and that she would soon have to take to wearing a wig. A well-to-do woman was the widow Meyer, for her good man had been a careful farmer, and year by year improved his property, gaining a great reputation in the district for his skill and knowledge. When he died and left her alone in the world to take care of Lisette and the farm, she was at first considerably at a loss, and left the management of everything to Pierre Dumont, the bailiff; but when Christmas came, and she went over the accounts with him, though she said nothing, she was anything but satisfied with the result, and made up her mind to henceforth take everything under her own immediate supervision and control. Dumont, who was a cunning, greedy fellow, had anticipated being able to make a rich harvest for the remainder of his days. He was terribly angry and disappointed at the widow's determination, and went away from the interview at which she announced to him her intention with anything but friendly feelings towards her. However, he still retained his post, while his son Lucien, a tall, handsome lad of seventeen, became a great favourite and frequent visitor to the widow and her daughter Lisette, who at this moment came dancing and singing through the door in answer to her

mother's call. Briefly to describe her, and then more immediately to my story. At the time we see her she was just completing the last day of her fourteenth year, but she was one of those slender, fragile little beings, with fully developed features, who have all the appearance of womanhood long before the proper time. The warm air of her native district, that gave her countrymen their brown hands and sunburnt cheeks, had left her complexion as white as a lily, and as she sat down on the grass beside her mother's chair the contrast was most remarkable. A pretty picture they made in that mellow evening glow, dressed in the costume of the country, with their tall white caps, so stiff and clean ; Lisette with her face resting coaxingly against her mother's knee, while the widow gently stroked the tiny hand that had been placed in hers.

"Mother," said Lisette, looking up into the widow's face, "to-morrow is my birthday, you know, and you promised me I should have Lucien to dinner, so this morning I asked him to come."

"Quite right, my dear, quite right," was the reply ; "Lucien is a good lad, a very good lad, and I am always pleased to see him. I wish I could say the same of his father ; he's an ill-conditioned cur, and nothing else."

"So he is," added Lisette ; "and he is so cruel to poor Lucien, and is always finding fault with him till he hates going home at all, and that's why he spends his time wandering about the woods."

"With somebody with him, eh, Lisette?" said the widow, with a twinkle in her eye. "However, I have to see Dumont

this evening, and so when he comes tell him I am in the parlour, ready to receive him." With that she rose and walked slowly toward the house, turning round as she passed through the porch to kiss her hand to Lisette.

As for that young lady she remained sitting on the grass, her head resting against the chair on which her mother had been sitting. She was thinking about Lucien, her dear old friend and playfellow Lucien! Now—as no doubt most people are aware—parents in France, especially in the country districts, think of marrying their children at a very early age, and the widow had already selected Lucien, for whom she entertained a great affection, as the future husband for her darling child. She pictured to herself how they would all live happily together, so that Lisette might never be separated from her. The only thing that ever made her hesitate was her objection to Lucien's father, of whom, as we have heard from her own lips, she entertained no very high opinion. However, she shelved her antipathy to him, and Lucien and Lisette did pretty much as they liked in the way of wandering about alone together. Boys and girls do love after a fashion, and these two young people were in their way very much attached to one another. So Lisette sat musing on the grass, wishing very much that Lucien would come and talk to her.

Presently the individual she wished for so much came sauntering through the gate, but as soon as he caught sight of Lisette he quickened his pace and threw himself down by her side.

"I couldn't stand it any longer down yonder, Lis," he said

wearily. "Father has been in an awful temper all day, and threatened to kick me out of the house because I asked him for a holiday to-morrow, to come and spend your birthday with you. He told me I was an idle vagabond, and that it was high time I was earning my own living, instead of burdening him to keep me. At last I snatched up my cap and rushed out of the house, for I knew if I had stayed I should have said something I ought not."

"Poor Lucien ! what a shame it is," returned Lisette, "that he should put himself into these tempers without any cause!"

"I am not sure of that," interrupted Lucien. "I fancy this time there is a cause, for I heard him muttering something about a heavy bill that he had been pressed to pay, and I saw him ride off in the direction of Avranches almost directly after I came away."

"Well, I don't see that that's any reason why he should scold you as he does," said Lisette. "Then I suppose he will not be able to come and see mother this evening," she added after a pause.

"I should fancy not," was Lucien's reply ; and at this stage of the conversation the widow joined them, and she was forthwith made acquainted with what had occurred. To tell the truth, she was not altogether sorry at being spared an interview with Dumont, for on such occasions she had hard work to put up with the snarls and growls of her ill-tempered bailiff, who always took care to have a nice little series of complaints to detail to her.

What a lovely evening it was ! so calm and peaceful that as

the widow, Lisette, and Lucien, sat under the trees, enjoying the fresh fruit and delicate thick cream which with them took the place of tea, they might almost have fancied themselves alone in the world. The silence was scarcely broken by the rustling leaves, through which the gentle breeze from the sea whispered now and then, and toyed with the tiny lock of golden hair that peeped out from beneath Lisette's cap. They were all very happy together, and Lucien forgot all his troubles and chattered away in the fulness of youth's animal spirits. Thus they sat till the shadows grew darker and darker, and all trace of daylight died away.

"There ought to be a full moon to-night," said Lucien, after a prolonged silence, looking up to the sky, which seemed to have become suddenly overcast.

"Ugh, my rheumatism is twinging me in the shoulder," added the widow; "you mark my words, we're going to have a storm."

Almost at that moment some heavy rain-drops began to fall, and a sudden flash of lightning gave warning of the approaching tempest. So they all hurried indoors, and not a bit too soon, for in a few minutes a deluge seemed to burst from the heavens, and the peals of thunder and the flashes of lightning were repeated at frequent intervals. Lisette crept very close to Lucien, and was dreadfully frightened, so she said, though she seemed to make herself very comfortable when she had nestled her head against his shoulder.

The rain still continued pouring down in torrents, and so when Lucien rose to go, the widow would not hear of it, but

told him he must remain and sleep, an invitation that he was not loth to accept, considering his walk home would ensure his being wetted to the skin, to say nothing of the brutal reception he would be sure to meet with at his father's hands. So he remained at the farm, and in due course was snoring contentedly between the snowy sheets that had the name of Meyer worked in large letters on the corner.

As for Dumont, his son's guess that there was something more than ordinary the matter with him was quite correct. He was certainly in anything but an agreeable condition of mind. An old friend to whom he owed a very large sum of money had died suddenly, and the relations who had come into his property had called in all outstanding debts, and his among others. Now, although he had been greedy and avaricious, Pierre Dumont was anything but careful; and instead of hoarding his money squandered it away in nightly drinkings at the village "cabaret." Consequently this peremptory call upon him far exceeded all that he was able to meet, and he had posted off to Avranches in the hope of being able to gain indulgence and time for payment. But all was no avail ; the answer was, the money must be paid, and that within twenty hours. Pierre Dumont rode home from his fruitless errand in a state of great anxiety.

Still fell the rain heavily, while the wind that had now risen was shaking and rattling the windows of the widow's old farmhouse, and making it tremble in every member of its ancient framework. Presently a more violent gust came banging against the lattice of the room in which Lucien was sleeping

and woke him ; he sat up in his bed and rubbed his eyes. When he had satisfied himself that there was nothing to be alarmed at, he laid himself down and prepared to go to sleep again. But somehow or other his eyes would keep open, and his ears were painfully alive to every sound. Suddenly he heard a noise as if the window of the parlour over which he was sleeping was being raised. He listened, and became certain that some one was lifting it slowly in order to avoid making a noise. He did not hesitate a moment what to do, for his life in the open air and the Breton blood in his veins made him brave and fearless of danger. He sprang out of bed and hastily drawing on his clothes opened the door, and felt his way down the stairs to the door of the parlour. It was partly open, and he paused there to consider what to do. He was unarmed, whereas the adversary or adversaries he would have to encounter would be sure to have taken the precaution of carrying some weapons of defence. Moments were precious ; the widow's strong cupboard in which she always kept a considerable sum of money—for robbers were but rare things in the district—was in the corner of the parlour, and Lucien recollect ed this. Swiftly he crept back to his room, and taking up his long clasp knife that he had laid on the table, softly stole back and quietly pushed open the parlour door. A man was standing at the cupboard with a small lantern in his hand, by the light of which Lucien could see that the lock and fastening had been forced open. The face of the intruder was hidden in the darkness. Slowly on tiptoe Lucien made his way, the distance between the door and the cupboard seemed interminable,

but he reached the thief at last, and seizing him in his grasp as in a vice, he dragged him down on to his back on the floor. In a moment he was struck dumb by a voice hissing into his ear—

“Boy, would you betray your father ?”

His grasp relaxed, he shrank back in horror, and then let go his hold, while Pierre Dumont—for it was he—dashed through the open window and vanished in the darkness without. Lucien rose to his feet as if in a dream, and when the light came, his face was pale and haggard, and his eyes glazed with horror. Lisette stood in the doorway with her mother; as they approached him he drew away as if to avoid them.

“What’s this ?” said the widow, making up to the cupboard ; “the bag with my midsummer quarter’s takings gone, and the window wide open ! Who can have done this ?”

Lisette stood looking on in fear and amazement, while Lucien shrank farther and farther away from them, his head hanging down and his chin resting on his breast.

“What were you doing here ?” continued the widow, addressing him almost fiercely, and in a tone that seemed to convey a latent suspicion in her mind that he had something to do with the theft. Lucien answered not a word, but passed his hand over his forehead as if he were in pain.

“Can you give me no explanation ?” further inquired his questioner in a cold, calm voice.

“Do, Lucien, do tell mother what you saw,” pleaded Lisette, taking his hand and looking up into his eyes. But he only shook his head mournfully and murmured—

"I know nothing, I saw nothing."

"Listen to me, Lucien Dumont," said the widow, crossing up to and standing close by him; "I have trusted you as a son, I have believed in your truth and honesty as if you were my own child. I entreat you, for Lisette's sake and mine, to tell me all you know of this matter. How much that is I will not dare to guess, but your face is witness to something more than your mouth dares to speak."

Still Lucien answered not, he raised his eye and looked his benefactress full in the face, then throwing himself on his knees at her feet, he buried his head in his hands and sobbed out, "I cannot, I dare not."

"So be it then. I have entreated your confidence, you have refused it me, and you must leave my threshold never to enter it again. Whether you have robbed me or not it matters not, I shall not appeal to the law; I leave you to the punishment your own conscience will inflict on you. And now go, I have done with you."

"Oh mother, don't send him away," entreated Lisette. "I am sure he is innocent, he could not be so wicked, so ungrateful;" and she threw herself sobbing into her mother's arms. But the widow was unmoved; she merely said, "I have spoken, Lucien Dumont, go!"

He raised himself quickly from his position of humility, and drawing himself up to his full height, passed out into the rain and night. Without uttering a word, the widow closed the window, and led Lisette, who was crying as if her heart would break, up to bed again. Taking her in her arms, she soothed

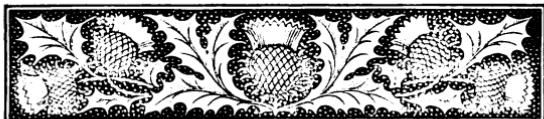
her till her red eyes closed from sheer exhaustion, and the poor little girl slept. Thus it was that when the storm and rain had ceased, the early morning sun dawned on Lisette's birthday. How sad were the auspices under which she was to inaugurate a new year of life! A blight had fallen on the rosebud, and it hung its head and was bowed towards the earth. Thus the day passed in sorrow and gloom, and evening came again.

Reflection had done the widow good; she began to think that she had been perhaps too hard upon Lucien and too hasty beside, and that if she had coaxed him a little more she might have had an explanation. Further than this, the more she thought about the matter the more satisfied did she become in her mind that he was not a thief. As for Lisette, she was as quiet as a little mouse, but she was none the less unhappy because she was silent. To think that Lucien, her dear old friend Lucien, should be a thief, oh, it was too dreadful!

Some one came hurriedly in at the garden gate, it was Pierre Dumont's old housekeeper; her face was pale as death, and when she asked for Madame Meyer, it was in an agitated voice. A few minutes after, the widow and she came out of the house together, and they walked away quickly. Alas! should I pause longer over this part of my story? Pierre Dumont, in his flight from the robbery of his mistress's money, had been drowned in attempting to cross the wooden bridge over the ford in front of his house that at ordinary seasons was quite safe; but the rain had swollen the usually small stream into a torrent, and its remorseless waters swept him away. In his pocket was found the bag of money containing the midsummer rents.

The widow was of course greatly shocked at this violent termination to a guilty career, but it satisfied her that Lucien was innocent. She and Lisette were sitting alone in the parlour that evening, when a tap came at the window. Lisette flew and opened it. Lucien stood there just as he had left them the night before, but he looked very ill, and he sank fainting on the threshold. For six whole weeks he lay on a bed of sickness, hovering between life and death, but youth gained the victory in the end and conquered the fever. When he was well enough, they told him of his father's fate, and how his innocence had been established. The winter came, and he was strong and about again, and his home was at the farm now, and the widow would not hear of his leaving her. I have told how sad was the celebration of one of Lisette's birthdays; shall I relate the happiness of another, and what came of it? A wedding ring, a marriage feast, and so on, and some inquisitive persons heard Lucien whisper to Lisette, when he thought no one was by, "My own darling little wife;" the meaning of which obscure sentence I leave to wiser heads than mine to interpret.





“Cousin Fanny.”

SNUGLY esconced, in the corner of a first-class carriage, Master—I beg his pardon—Mr. Cecil Desmond was hurrying homeward, for the Christmas vacation (they do not say holidays at Harrow) as fast as a Great Western express train could carry him. Although he was evidently endeavouring to give himself the appearance of thorough ease and composure befitting a man of the world, it required no very great acuteness of perception, to see that he was boiling over with boyish exuberance at the prospect of home, its freedom and pleasures, and had no little difficulty to prevent his spirits getting the better of him. However, when at last he got rid of his fellow-passengers, and had the carriage all to himself, he gave in to them, and sang and shouted at the top of his voice, to the inexpressible horror of a nervous old lady in the next compartment, who was firmly possessed with a notion that the partition only divided her from a dangerous lunatic, who sooner or later would force his way through it and murder her on the spot. Meanwhile, the object of her fears, entirely ignorant of her existence, was contemplating the fun he would have at the Grange, and wondering how his dear old pony, Taffy, was.

Here, according to custom, I must break off, to try and draw the young gentleman's portrait. In respect to age, Cecil Desmond, only son and heir of George Desmond, of the Grange, Coggleton, in the county of Stiffshire, was just half way between fifteen and sixteen, though I am bound to add that everybody took him to be a good deal older. In the first place, he was decidedly precocious, like most public-school boys; and moreover, he already had some slight pretensions to whiskers, while his upper lip was delicately shaded with a fringe of light coloured down. Without entering too inquisitively into the mysteries of his toilet, it is right to state that this latter hairy nothing was a source of continual anxiety, and was perpetually being subjected to a system of forcing, in the shape of stimulating lotions, the only merit of which was that they were perfectly harmless. In short, Master Cecil was a regular young dandy: his hair was always irreproachably parted behind and down the centre, his clothes were undeniably the best cut, while his hats and boots could only have come from the neighbourhood of Bond Street. Desmond "*père*" took an especial pleasure in seeing his son well dressed; he had been a bit of a "*beau*" in his time; and besides, it was but right that the only child of one of the richest country gentlemen in Stiffshire should not want for the advantages that tailor and hatter can afford. But though, as I have said, Cecil was a dandy, and perhaps wore clothes just a trifle too old in cut for him, he always looked a thorough young gentleman, and, still better, behaved like one. His two years' experience at Harrow had given him an easy deportment and self-possession in company, that placed

him in favourable contrast beside the sons of the neighbouring squires at home, whose anxious mammas shuddered when a public school was suggested for their young hopefuls. He had learned to think for himself, to take care of himself, and I am proud, as his historian, to be able to add that he knew the value of money, a quality that, it is much to be feared, is sadly at a discount among the rising male generation. Cecil was a good-looking boy, and no more : he had bright, cheerful eyes that gained the confidence at once, and a well-shaped, laughing mouth. As for his nose, there was too little of it to render it worthy consideration ; and with that member of his physiognomy we will conclude this digression, and return to the railway carriage and its occupant.

It was quite dark when Cecil arrived at Coggleton station, and uncommonly glad he was to be at the end of his journey. Waiting to receive him, he found Polly, the black mare, in the dog-cart ; and Hayfork, the head coachman, whose attachment for young master was so great that, contrary to all precedent, he had turned out this bitter cold night to drive over and meet him himself, instead of sending one of the understrappers.

"I loves that lad," he would say to his wife, in the privacy of his own room, "as if he were my own chick. Dear heart, alive ! he is made of the right sort, he is. I never knowed one of his age as had such a seat on a horse's back and such a hand on a horse's mouth : the guvnor is a baby to him." And Hayfork was right ; Cecil could do just what he liked with any horse except one, as we shall presently see,—first, because

he was fearless ; and next, because he always conquered by kindness.

“ Well, Hayfork,” said Cecil, jumping up into the driving seat and taking the reins from the old coachman, who surrendered them as a matter of course, a thing he never would do to any one but Mr. Desmond, “ how are they all at home ? ”

“ Pretty well, Master Cecil,” was the reply. “ I am right glad to see you again. Taffy’s as right and sound as the Bank of England, and I’ve had him shod against the day after to-morrow.”

“ The day after to-morrow ? ” inquired Cecil, touching the mare with the whip, a proceeding she did not appear to like. “ Why, what’s going to happen ? ”

“ Only the hounds, sir,” replied Hayfork rubbing his hands. “ They’re to meet at the Grange, and you’re sure to have a clipping run, for there’s a fox’s earth in Twenty Acres, and I saw the varmint the other night, and he was a beauty.”

“ Hurrah,” shouted Cecil in delight at the news. “ You’re a jolly brick, Hayfork. But, I say, is there any one stopping at the Grange ? ”

“ Any one stopping ! ” was the answer ; “ bless you, Master Cecil, the house is that full that James the butler has had to sleep in my sitting-room. There’s Captain Penton and Mr. Softhead and a lot of gentlemen I don’t know, and Mrs. Vernon and Miss Fanny.”

“ Oh, that’s enough,” interrupted Cecil, “ so long as cousin Fanny is there it’s all right. She’s an awfully jolly girl, Hayfork.”

Having communicated this startling piece of intelligence,

he relapsed into silence, nor did he address another observation to his companion during the remainder of the drive.

And now I must make another digression, to explain certain matters, and more particularly to account for this eccentric behaviour. I hope I shall not be complained of as treading on the toes of somebody's dignity, but my duty as historian compels me to assert that there is a most extraordinary predisposition among hobbledehoys to fall in love (so they call it) with ladies considerably older than themselves. This was what had happened to my young gentleman, and I am going to try and show how very foolish it is.

Cousin Fanny was undoubtedly a very pretty girl, and beside just what Cecil had called her, a jolly one. She had plenty of fun in her, could play and sing to perfection, was invaluable in getting up charades or round games, and rode like an Amazon. But she was twenty ! Everybody liked her, from old Mrs. Desmond, Cecil's grandmamma, down to boy Harry who looked after the dogs. She was endued with plenty of good, sound, common sense, but had not a particle of vanity in her whole composition. In short, she was as near perfection as a young lady could be, and was always a welcome and favoured visitor at the Grange.

It must be an admitted fact, that Cousin Fanny had been too much for Master Cecil ; at least he had got an idiotic notion into his juvenile head that he was dreadfully in love with her. Before he went to Harrow he had regarded her much after the same uncomplimentary fashion as boys of that age are wont to regard girls. Nuisances, stupidis, tell-tale-

tits ! But what with public-school life, an increase in stature, and, above all, the development of the hairy nothings, a change had come over him, and their long rides and innumerable games of croquet during the last Midsummer holidays had quite overcome his youthful affections. It was indeed a "Black Monday" when the day arrived for him to say good-bye to Cousin Fanny, and betake himself back to Harrow. For four-and-twenty hours he was inconsolable, and seriously contemplated writing to the young lady and making a clean breast of it. Indeed he adopted such a woe-begone but reckless air on his arrival at school, that his tutor got quite seriously alarmed, and anxiously inquired "whether he was in pain?" This was a finisher to Cecil, who gasped out a negative, and then slunk away to bed, disgusted with everybody, and more particularly with himself. I am in duty bound to add, that at the end of twenty-four hours, Cousin Fanny was, if not altogether forgotten, at least, less disturbing in her influence, and by the next half-holiday her juvenile adorer was himself again. Hayfork's information, however, as to her being again a visitor at the Grange, had re-awakened him to the fact that she was a jolly girl, and imperceptibly he found himself drifting back into the old train of thoughts.

There was a large party at dinner that evening ; but Cecil, being the host's son and heir, and the latest arrival, engaged a very large share of attention. He had tried very hard to get a seat near his cousin ; but Captain Penton, a fine dashing-looking fellow, had taken her into the dining-room and occupied the chair on one side of her, while on the other,

a young Mr. Blakely, the son of one of Mr. Desmond's neighbours, was trying hard to make himself agreeable. Cecil was in despair, and felt himself much injured. What right, he asked himself, had this captain, with his long moustache, to go up to his cousin and offer her his arm as a matter of course? Did he not hate him, and wish he had got him in a scrimmage at foot-ball, to have a good peg at his shins. And then afterwards in the drawing-room, what business had he, immediately on entering, to stride across to the sofa on which she was sitting, and fling his big, clumsy body down beside her? Above all, how could he dare to take her hand and lead her to the piano, when she had been asked to sing; and then, the greatest insolence of all, assume to himself the privilege of turning over the leaves of her music for her, an agreeable duty that Cecil had always fancied peculiarly his own? Our young gentleman looked on in a perspiration of indignation. Cousin Fanny had only spoken to him once in the course of the evening, and that was to observe "that he was so much grown she would hardly have known him."

She had rather a disagreeable habit of talking about his age, and calling him a boy, an indignity that he fiercely resented when offered by anybody else; but none are so blind as those who will not see, and what would have been offensive in others, was capital fun in Cousin Fanny. Howbeit, Cecil, when he retired to the privacy of his room that evening, felt a strong predisposition to call Captain Penton to account for the familiar tone he adopted towards Miss Fanny Vernon, and entertained very serious notions of coffee and pistols in

the shrubbery. One thing, however, he was quite determined upon, and that was to write a letter to his cousin, and avow his passion. Generally speaking, when rash resolves of this description, or in fact of any kind, are formed, it is good to sleep upon them before taking any active steps to carry them into execution. Cecil did sleep on his, and soundly too; but the next morning his mind was not in the slightest degree altered, and after breakfast he occupied himself till luncheon-time in the composition of the fatal epistle, which after wasting nearly half a quire of his mother's best cream-laid note paper, he managed to settle in the following terms.

“Darling cousin Fanny.

“I am afraid you will think me an awful young muff, but I cannot help it if you do. I would much rather have told you what I want to say, but the fact is, I am rather funky, and so I do hope you will forgive me. I say, you wont be angry, will you? only you have been so awfully jolly to me, and I could not help getting spooney. I hope that's spelt right, but I can't find the word in the guvnor's dictionary, and so have had to make a shot at it. But I say, cousin Fanny, it's no use, I can't keep it to myself any longer: I am in love with you, and I write to tell you so, because I hope you are with me, and that you will write back to me, and say you are. You are only four years and a-half older than I am, and that isn't much, you know; and if you could only wait for me till I am twenty-one, I know the guvnor would do the liberal. Don't say no. I'll

work awfully hard when I get back to Harrow. Don't tell any body about this.

"Ever your most affectionate lover,

"CECIL."

"There that will do, I think," said Cecil to himself, sealing the letter with an air of triumph, and putting it into his pocket. "I'll slip it quietly into her hand, the first time I get the chance." This he managed to accomplish in the course of the evening, after dinner, and when he went to bed he slept like a top, quite satisfied with his day's work.

Meanwhile the Meet that was to come off on the morrow had been the chief topic of conversation, and every horse in Mr. Desmond's stable, that was capable of being ridden to hounds, was placed under contribution. Not without much protest from Captain Penton, it was at length arranged that Fanny should ride an animal on whose vicious propensities Hayfork was never weary of dilating, by name Saucy Boy. He was a fine, powerful chestnut, the very picture of muscle and breeding, but he was blessed with one of the most uncertain tempers that ever attached to a member of the equine race.

"Nonsense, I'm not afraid of him," said Fanny, with a self-confident toss of her head. "I've ridden him often enough before now, and we were always the best of friends."

"But Fanny, my love," ventured Mrs. Desmond, "it's a very different matter taking a quiet ride along the road, and going out with the hounds."

"Nonsense, auntie," replied the young lady; "Saucy Boy won't try any of his pranks with me, wherever he is."

After one or two further vain attempts to dissuade her from her intention, the endeavour was abandoned as hopeless, and orders were at last given in accordance with her wishes.

Cecil, who I have before said was a first-rate horseman, had not taken any part in the discussion ; probably because, seeing that his cousin was not to be turned from her purpose, and knowing better than any one, except Hayfork, what sort of a customer Saucy Boy was to deal with, he felt that anything he might say would do more harm than good. He made up his mind, however, to turn out of bed the first thing in the morning, and give the horse a good hour's exercise, so as to quiet him down a little.

At seven o'clock the next morning he was in the stable-yard, waiting for Saucy Boy to be brought out, who presently appeared, led by Hayfork. Cecil saw in a moment that the brute was on mischief bent, his eyes were anything but encouraging, and his ears lay ominously back. But Cecil was never afraid of any horse in his life, and in a moment he had vaulted on to the animal's back, and had gathered the bridle into his hand with a firm grasp.

"Do be careful, Master Cecil," Hayfork shouted, as with many twists and turns, Saucy Boy wriggled out of the yard; "use the curb as little as you can, for it makes him almost mad."

"All right, Hayfork," replied Cecil, perfectly at home in the saddle, and prepared to administer any correction that his Bucephalus might need. "I'll give him a lesson, if he comes any of his capers with me."

About a mile from the Grange there was a large common covered with furze and gorse, though affording ample space for a good gallop. Thither Cecil directed Saucy Boy, who, just because his rider wanted to go one way, immediately took it into his head to prefer an opposite direction. He was, however, somewhat astonished at the punishment his disobedience had brought down upon him, and was so completely taken aback that for a while he gave in. But when he got to Coggleton Common, and sniffed the stiff breeze that was blowing over the gorse and heather, his spirits and temper rose to fever heat; he pulled at his bridle, shook his head, and tried to get the bit between his teeth; in short, he gave Cecil a pretty time of it.

"It really never will do for Cousin Fanny to ride this brute," said Cecil half aloud, "he'd drag her arms off. Would you?" he added, addressing Saucy Boy, who had bent his head down till he had nearly got it between his forelegs. Then came a prolonged struggle for mastery. The horse plunged and kicked and reared, but all to no purpose, his rider was firm and immovable as if he had been glued into his saddle. The fight lasted some minutes; at length Cecil heard a snap, and before he had time to see that one of the reins had parted, Saucy Boy had bolted with him and was tearing along wildly over gorse and heather. In the blindness of his rage and fury he dashed along regardless of all obstacles.

Even now Cecil was not frightened. Perfectly cool and collected, he calculated that if the horse would but keep straight on across the common, he would have no danger to

apprehend. There was a good four miles before him, and such rough travelling would sooner bring the brute to his senses than anything else. The only thing to be feared was, lest he should swerve to the right, which would carry them straight to a deep railway cutting and—death. There could be no other alternative, and Cecil required no one to tell him so. Saucy Boy, as if possessed by a demon, despite the most strenuous efforts to the contrary, gradually inclined his head in the very direction his rider so dreaded.

In the five minutes that followed, Cecil Desmond stood face to face with death! Two hundred yards in front rose a small fence, and just beyond that he could see the chasm toward which he was being hurried. It was an awful season and, in those few seconds, memories came trooping back, and he murmured out, "God have mercy upon me." He thought he would throw himself off, but resolved not to do that, till every other hope was gone. On rushed the infuriated brute, and nearer and nearer came the destruction he knew not of. The fence was reached; sick and giddy Cecil closed his eyes, his feet were out of the stirrups and he was preparing to make a throw for life. There was a crash of wood, a sudden and violent check, and he felt himself spinning in the air, and, thank God, bruised and shaken, but alive, a moment after on mother earth. Well might he shudder with horror, when opening his eyes and collecting his scattered senses, he found himself lying within two feet of the edge of the cutting, while Saucy Boy, with a broken leg, was vainly endeavouring to stand up. His rage and fury had ended, as man's passion often does, with self-damage-

ment, and in less than an hour he would be put out of his misery he had brought upon himself by his own wild and wilful conduct. Cecil had not come off scatheless ; his right shoulder was put out and was giving him great pain ; while the terrible ordeal through which he had passed had thoroughly upset his nerves. He made his way home as best he could on foot. As may be imagined, when he arrived everybody was in dismay and consternation ; he was immediately carried up-stairs and laid on his bed, while Hayfork went off at full gallop for the doctor, who presently returned and put the dislocated joint back into its proper place, giving strict orders that the patient was to be kept perfectly quiet. Instead of meeting at the Grange, the hounds were taken to an adjoining farm, while Fanny abandoned all idea of going out with them. As she was passing by Cecil's room in the evening, on her way up to dress for dinner, she heard him call out to her to come and speak to him. His letter, which of course she had read, she had laughed at as might have been expected, but she could not help feeling that she had had something to do with the accident that had befallen him with Saucy Boy, for Hayfork had informed her "that Master Cecil had said he'd a precious deal rather have his neck broken, than that she should run any danger."

So she went in obedience to the call, and sitting down by the bed, took Cecil's hand in hers.

"I wanted to see you so much," he said. "I've been thinking about that silly note I wrote you. I hope you have burned it, for I have been thinking since I have been lying

here, and I know what a stupid young idiot I have been. You're not angry, are you?"

"Angry, dear Cecil," she answered softly, "why should I be angry? We are all foolish sometimes. Why, do you know I shall be getting quite an old woman when the time comes for you to think of such things as you wrote to me about. You must feel certain that I love you as my dear, dear brother, and always shall if you will let me, and I shall never forget as long as I live how you have run yourself into such danger for my sake: never Cecil, my own dear brother, never."

And then she bent down and kissed him, and he felt more than one warm tear fall upon his face. His silly, boyish romance was at an end, and putting his uninjured arm round her neck he murmured "Ever my own darling sister Fanny."

As a sort of postscript, it is right to add, that two months after Cecil's accident and Saucy Boy's death, Miss Fanny Vernon became Mrs. Penton. She and her husband are always having Cecil to stay with them, and that young gentleman declares that the gallant Captain is the jolliest brick in Christendom.



